# *SOCIAL WORK FIELD EDUCATOR PRACTICE: EXPANDING THE VISION*

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work**

**by**

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# ABSTRACT

Social workers identify experiential learning opportunities as critical components of their education, but in Aotearoa New Zealand there is significant concern due to increasing demand and variable quality in field education. Although training more field educators and establishing professional standards is certainly an important part of addressing these challenges, this study explored the broader contextual factors that impact field educator practice. The research reported in this thesis focused on mediating factors in the professional socialisation and practice of social work field educators, with the objective of exploring how to influence developmental processes.

This qualitative enquiry can be located within a constructionist paradigm, informed by critical pragmatism and cultural-historical activity theory. The exploratory descriptive design focused on social work field education in Canterbury, Aotearoa New Zealand. In the first phase, 20 field educators participated in individual interviews and thematic analysis was used to identify a number of key influences on their practice. This initial analysis was then shared with participants in five focus groups to verify the conclusions and identify appropriate professional responses to the issues identified. Further thematic analysis was then undertaken and a model of field education articulated to shape future developments.

Analysis of the interviews identified a number of tensions within the field education activity system and between two other dominant systems; professional practice and social work education. Tensions within activity systems indicate potential for transformational change and sites for developmental learning. However, analysis also suggested that power dynamics between practice and education, and the alienation of field educators, create barriers and resistance to change. This is particularly evident in the persistence of monoculturalism in field educator practice. The development of professional learning communities for field educators is proposed, as a response to the challenges currently facing field education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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# GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

**Field Education Terms:** The following terms have been used throughout this thesis to denote the various roles in field education. These definitions are taken from the Social Work Field Education Guidelines developed by Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (2016).

*Field Educator:* A social worker in the organisation where a placement occurs who provides education and supervision for a student social worker.

*Field Mentor:* A professional in the organisation where a placement occurs who provides support and guidance for a student social worker but is not responsible for education and supervision. A field mentor works collaboratively with an external field educator.

*External Field Educator:* A social worker located outside of the organisation where a placement occurs who provides education and supervision for student social worker being supported by a field mentor.

*Field Education Co-ordinator:* A social work educator from an academic institution who is responsible for organising and supporting a field education programme.

*Field Liaison:* A social work educator from an academic institution who is the primary contact person for the student, field educator, mentor and external field educator during a placement. This role may include assisting with the development of learning goals, monitoring placement progress and provision of guidance and support for students and field educators.

**Abbreviations:** The following abbreviations have been used throughout this thesis.

*ANZASW:* Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers.

*CSWEANZ:* Council of Social Work Educators Aotearoa New Zealand.

*SWRA:* Social Workers Registration Act (2003).

*SWRB:* Social Workers Registration Board.

*TEC:* Tertiary Education Commission.

**Māori Terms:** The following Māori terms have been used in certain sections of this thesis. Brief translations are provided from the Māori dictionary (maoridictionary.co.nz) but it should be noted that fuller and multiple meanings can be attributed to words depending on the context in which they are used.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Ako* | To learn, study, teach. |
| *Aroha* | Affection, compassion, empathy. |
| *Awhi* | Embracing, caring, supporting. |
| *Kai* | Food, meal, to eat. |
| *Karakia* | Incantation, chant, prayer. |
| *Karanga* | Ceremonial call, welcome call. |
| *Kaupapa Māori* | Maori approach, a philosophical doctrine, incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of Maori society. |
| *Kōrero* | Narrative, story, talk. |
| *Mana* | Prestige, authority, control, influence, status. |
| *Marae* | The open area in front of the meeting house, where formal greetings and discussions take place. |
| *Mihimihi* | Speech of greeting, tribute. |
| *Pākehā* | New Zealander of European descent. |
| *Take* | Reason, purpose, origin. |
| *Tangata whenua* | Indigenous people, people of the land. |
| *Te ao Māori* | Māori world, Māori worldview. |
| *Te reo Māori* | Māori language. |
| *Teina* | Younger brother, younger sister. |
| *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* | The Treaty of Waitangi. |
| *Tika* | Truth, correctness, fairness. |
| *Tikanga* | Correct procedure, custom, protocol. |
| *Tuakana* | Elder brother, elder sister. |
| *Wairua* | Spirit, soul of a person. |
| *Whakamā* | To be ashamed, shy, bashful, embarrassed. |
| *Whakapapa* | Genealogy, lineage. |
| *Whanaungatanga* | Relationship, kinship, sense of family connection. |

# List of Appendices

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis is the story of my journey of inquiry into the factors that impact the way in which field education is undertaken by social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand (Aotearoa[1]). All journeys have a starting point and are undertaken for some purpose, and so I begin my story by explaining the background and objectives of this research project. I describe how I came to be interested in the topic of field education as a result of my own transition from being a social work practitioner to a social work educator. I also explore my position as both an insider- and outsider-researcher, along with the implications for the research. I then define field education and traverse a brief history of its use in social work. I also provide an overview of the context of social work field education in Aotearoa and consider the implications of the introduction of professional registration. Within this context, there have been significant concerns about the quality and quantity of placements (Tertiary Education Commission, 2009), despite field education being recognised as the primary pedagogical method for the socialisation of practitioners into the social work profession (Wayne, Raskin, & Bogo, 2010). For this reason, it is important to understand the factors that influence the socialisation and practise of field educators and to explore ways to influence the ongoing development of this professional activity. Therefore, I set out a series of research questions designed to

[1] Aotearoa is the Māori name for New Zealand. I have used Aotearoa throughout this thesis to acknowledge tangata whenua (indigenous people of New Zealand) and in recognition of the importance of te reo Māori (the Māori language) for building a bicultural society in this country.

address these concerns and guide this research. In the final section of this chapter, I provide a series of signposts to sections of the journey that I explore in depth as the story unfolds.

## 1.1 Personal Interest

My journey as a social worker began in 1994 when I commenced professional training and completed two field education placements. I had positive learning experiences during my placements, and the second of these inspired me to apply for roles in specialist mental health services, a sector I worked in for the following decade. During this period I undertook a variety of practitioner and manager roles in the UK and Aotearoa, and these included working with students on placement. I observed a range of approaches to teaching students and noticed that not all student experiences were positive. In 2006 I was fortunate to be given the opportunity to become the Chief Executive of the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers [ANZASW] and in this role participated in a project with the Tertiary Education Commission [TEC] looking at the future of social work education in Aotearoa (TEC, 2009). The team involved in this project identified that one of the significant challenges facing social work education was the variable quality and limited availability of field education. Despite these evident challenges, participating in this project highlighted to me the importance of educating future practitioners and I was inspired to apply for a role as an educator at a local polytechnic, where I discovered a passion for teaching.

A significant responsibility of my first job as a social work educator was to co-ordinate the field education programme. This role involved working with social work practitioners who were responsible for supporting students during their field education placement and facilitating the learning process in the workplace. Partly due to my own recent transition to an educator role, I became interested in how social workers learnt to be effective field educators. During my own transition from being a practitioner to an educator, I was fortunate to receive significant support and advice from a community of educators, and professional education that catalysed the development of a new identity. I noticed that there appeared to be a general lack of these same supports for field educators. These observations of the challenges involved in becoming a field educator, combined with my previous exposure to the concerns about quality and consistency in field education, led to my interest in the topic that became the focus of my research. I was interested in exploring the professional socialisation of social work field educators

and investigating ways in which field education might be developed beyond current practice.

The foregoing brief biography might be considered evidence of my position as an insider in relation to the social group that was the focus of my research. Merton's (1972) original discussion of the debate surrounding insider and outsider standpoints in research emphasised structural issues and identified membership of a social group or collective as the criteria for insider status. Although other theorists would define insiders and outsiders using different criteria (Griffith, 1998), most agree that insiders are in a particularly strong position to investigate certain issues as a result of their access to specific knowledge, information and informants (Costley, Elliott, & Gibbs, 2010; Unluer, 2012). It is certainly the case that I began this research with some understanding of the role of social workers and the professional context in which field education takes place. As a field education co-ordinator I was also well known to many field educators, understood relevant terminology, and had experience of many of the challenges that practitioners faced. I held a privileged position in that I had relatively easy access to participants for this study and a certain amount of professional credibility that possibly encouraged some field educators to agree to be interviewed. However, there are also disadvantages with being an insider researcher including role duality, making assumptions, and potential blindness to certain aspects of the phenomena (Unluer, 2012). I took a number of steps to address these challenges. For example, I declared my dual roles to participants during recruitment and explained how the boundaries would be maintained to minimise the likelihood of negative repercussions arising from participating in the research. I also undertook asked participants to confirm the key messages from the discussion at the end of each focus groups to try and minimise the potential for assuming that I understood the world of field educators, or conversely that I would not focus on certain important factors in the analysis. Furthermore, I engaged in supervision with two social work academics who challenged evidence of assumptions in my work. Therefore, my status as an insider within the social group represented by field educators presented me both with privileges and challenges to overcome.

Although I might be perceived as an insider researcher, from other perspectives I was also an outsider. As Merton (1972) points out, we all hold membership of multiple social groups at the same time and are never solely insiders or outsiders. For example, I represent certain dominant cultural groups, being a white middle aged man, originally

from the UK. These factors may have impacted recruitment or the way participants contributed to the research. Despite being a social worker, I had never worked as a field educator in Aotearoa and so the contextual nuances of the work were not known to me. As a social work educator, I may also have been viewed as an academic in an ivory tower, situating me as an outsider with some practitioners. As a field education co-ordinator, my role involved decisions about which field educators would be utilised and which provided quality placements, a further reason for practitioners to be cautious about what they shared with me. As an outsider, I worked to create and maintain trust with participants by demonstrating in the interviews, through the language I used, that I was open to hearing about both their positive and negative experience as field educators.

My various roles could, therefore, denote both insider and outsider status and I could be seen as one or the other by different participants or at various times in the research. Rather than assuming a dichotomy exists between these two researcher standpoints, I adopted the view that the roles of insider and outsider can also be considered extremes at either end of a continuum (Mercer, 2007), and that I moved back and forth and repeatedly crossed the boundaries between different roles (Griffith, 1998). Therefore, the implications of both positions had to be considered, and steps taken to respond flexibly to my fluctuating role as a social work researcher.

## 1.2 Social Work Education Context

There have long been debates about whether social work constitutes a profession and it has suffered from a reputation as a secondary applied discipline with anti-intellectual tendencies (Green, 2006). However, the profession has sought to establish itself on stronger scientific foundational principles and to institute professional standards and minimum requirements for academic qualification (Leighninger, 2012). Despite these changes, social work continues to have a contested status as an academic discipline, a situation that may only change with the re-imagination and redefinition of social work so as to move away from being captured by government positioning as a technocratic endeavour (Green, 2006). The current international definition of social work perhaps goes some way to address these challenges, positioning the profession as both academic and practice-based, and incorporating objectives related to social justice, change and cohesion (International Federation of Social Workers, 2015).

The first professional social work programme in Aotearoa began at Victoria University (Nash & Munford, 2001) and was available from 1950 (Beddoe, 2014). In more recent years there has been considerable growth in the number of programmes, from thirteen in 2008 to seventeen by 2014 (Hay, Ballantyne, & Brown, 2015). From the beginning of social work education in Aotearoa there have been significant challenges to establishing social work as an academic discipline and frequent pressure has been exerted by government and employers about what should be included in the curriculum (Nash, 2003). Education more broadly has been increasingly influenced by the institutionalisation of market principles into the management of academic institutions (Lynch, 2014). Universities have been forced away from a focus on social responsibility towards a corporate business model in which education is a commodity (George, Silver, & Preston, 2013). This neoliberal managerialism only exacerbated the pressures within the social work profession as education became seen as an instrument to produce an effective future workforce (Beddoe, 2014). The emphasis on preparing students for the realities of practice is particularly significant in the context of field education because learning takes place in the workplace. This same pressure has also been behind the growth of work integrated learning more generally within the tertiary education sector, as employers have increasingly demanded work-ready graduates (Coll & Zegwaard, 2011).

Since its inception, social work education has involved a combination of classroom-based learning and practical engagement in professional work. “Field education, also referred to as field practicum or field work, is the component of social work education where students learn to practice social work through delivering social work services in agency and community settings” (Bogo, 2006, p. 163). Field education has been described as the “signature pedagogy” (Boitel & Fromm, 2014, p. 608) of social work education, denoting it as “the teaching/learning interaction in which the student acquires and demonstrates the knowledge, skills, and values of the profession of social work” (p. 608). Although the validity of this designation has been questioned due to a lack of supporting research evidence (Holden, Barker, Rosenberg, Kuppens, & Ferrell, 2011), field education is undoubtedly a central component of social work education worldwide (Parker, 2005). Indeed, it is an integral part of the social work curriculum in accredited programmes in Aotearoa, and students are required to complete a minimum of 120 days field education as part of their degree (Social Workers Registration Board, 2016a). Field education is a collaborative process that requires a partnership between the student,

academics, field educators, and other staff in social service agencies (ANZASW, 2016). During field education, students are given an opportunity to engage in a series of tasks that develop their knowledge, values and skills and it allows them to evaluate their own motivation and suitability for professional work (Cleak & Wilson, 2012), as well as providing the opportunity for academic staff to assess the student's competence for practice.

Social work field education is provided by experienced practitioners who have been contracted by an academic institution for the purpose of supporting students during the period they are placed with a social services agency. In Aotearoa, field educators are generally expected to have a minimum of two years professional experience and be registered with the Social Workers Registration Board [SWRB] (ANZASW, 2016; SWRB, 2016a), although this is not always the case due to insufficient numbers of suitable social workers. Despite academic institutions providing short courses to prepare field educators for their role, it is common for social workers to begin working with students before they have completed this professional development (Maidment, 2000b). This is a challenge that the Council for Social Work Education Aotearoa New Zealand (CSWEANZ) and ANZASW, the professional association, have sought to address through the development of national guidelines for field educators (ANZASW, 2016) and more recent work to develop resources, training and a recognition programme (Sandford-Reed, 2017).

A variety of different terms are used within the literature to designate the role of the field educator, the work that they do and the related roles. In America and Canada the terms field instructor, field instruction, and field director are the accepted terms. Prior to 1989, it was common in the UK for the term student supervisor to be used but this was replaced with practice teacher and practice learning following the introduction of the Practice Teacher Award. This designation was intended to emphasise the teaching and learning nature of the work, a shift from a supervision process (Rogers, 1996). In Australia the terms field educator and field education have been popular (Zuchowski, 2015b), once again emphasising the education focus. In other professions, a range of other terms are used, such as preceptor (e.g. Rebholz, 2013 uses this term in nursing), clinical teaching (e.g. Sheehan & Jansen, 2006, use this term in inter-professional healthcare) and fieldwork supervisor (e.g., Thomas et al., 2007, use this term in Occupational Therapy).

In New Zealand a range of field education titles have been used since the inception of social work education, creating the potential for confusion. These have included practice supervisor, student supervisor, fieldwork supervisor, agency mentor, fieldwork teacher and field educator. Joyce (1998) has argued that some of this language has contributed to a separation of theory and practice and the marginalisation of field education. However, in recent years there has been a move to standardise the terminology to facilitate clearer communication and allow for the development of national guidelines by the professional association (ANZASW, 2016). Within the following discussion, I have consistently adopted the terms used by ANZASW (see glossary) even if the original articles used other terms. Accordingly, field education is the teaching and learning process that happens during a placement, the field educator is the social worker supporting the student in the agency, the field education co-ordinator is the person responsible for organising placements on behalf of the academic institution and the academic liaison is the person who visits the student during the placement and conducts the final assessment. Hopefully, the use of consistent terms throughout this thesis will facilitate clarity in the discussion.

The alliance between the state, employers and the profession that has shaped social work during its history in Aotearoa, has also influenced the delivery of social work education, both in the classroom and in the field (Nash, 1997). Social work has been dominated by a series of approaches to practice that have reflected the skills valued by employers. The early period of formal social work in Aotearoa was characterised by psychosocial approaches and learning to be a social worker involved engagement in practical tasks (Beddoe, 1999). In this period, field educators were positioned as master practitioners who were guiding apprentices through a journey of learning by doing. During the 1960s and 1970s, the profession became influenced by psychodynamic theory and in turn field education adopted the language of counselling. The relationship between a field educator and a student was conceptualised as a therapist and client with the objective of helping students explore their own internal world to prepare them for establishing therapeutic relationships. The following two decades witnessed significant challenges to social work from the market economy and a crisis in field education due to the diminishing availability of field educators (Beddoe & Worrall, 1997). Students during this period were viewed as novice practitioners who would perform specific tasks to a required standard set by their supervisor (Beddoe, 1999). The contemporary period has seen another shift and a greater focus on diversity and localised provision. In

this environment, the role of field educators has increasingly been seen as preparing students for variety in service models, through engagement in reflexive practice. The emphases during different periods of development within social work in Aotearoa seem to have translated into multiple expectations for field education, potentially leading to confusion for practitioners about how they should approach the task. Given this history, it is particularly important to understand the factors that influence the practice of field educators, including those related to specific cultures.

## 1.3 Cultural Considerations

Traditional ways of supporting vulnerable members of society were undoubtedly a part of Māori cultural life from when they first migrated to Aotearoa. "What we know today as 'social work' is a recent and culturally specific manifestation of a societal function that is as old as the human race" (Faith, 2008 p. 247). However, later migrations from western countries to Aotearoa in the nineteenth-century resulted in significant social problems that existing support systems were unable to manage, resulting in disastrous effects and population decline for tangata whenua[2] (Walsh-Tapiata, 2008). Formal forms of social work did not emerge until the middle of the twentieth century and this early history was characterised by a failure to meet the needs of Māori (Berridge et al., 1984). The influence of western philosophy and the impact of endemic racism in service delivery was ultimately identified in the Puao Te Ata Tu [Day Break] report (Ministerial Advisory Committee, 1988). Despite attempts within the profession to address these issues (Fraser & Briggs, 2016), there remains an ongoing challenge to deliver truly bicultural social work.

Social workers have an ethical obligation to promote a society that is based on the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi[3] (ANZASW, 2015). The Treaty is the founding document of Aotearoa, signed to establish a partnership between the Māori tribes and the British crown. Knowledge about the history and obligations that flow from the treaty is a learning outcome of all social work programmes recognised by the SWRB (2016a). It is also an ethical obligation for social workers to relinquish mono-cultural

[2] Indigenous people, people of the land.

[3] The Treaty of Waitangi.

control over power and resources and promote social work models of practice that are grounded in a Māori worldview (ANZASW, 2015). Despite these obligations, there are limited examples of field education pedagogy that have been developed from a Māori perspective.

Research into the objectives of social work field education in Aotearoa found that current models were failing to develop competence for working with Māori and identified this as a significant area of further development (Hay, O'Donoghue, & Blagdon, 2006). Herewini and Gray (1999) did discuss ways to promote inclusion of Māori in field education but focused their attention more on structural issues, such as Māori academic staffing, use of Māori placement agencies, Māori tutorial groups, Māori external supervision, or assessment tasks, rather than the pedagogical approaches of field educators. Ward (2006) also discussed a bi-cultural model for field education co-ordinators based in academic institutions but did not focus on what this might mean for the work of the field educators working directly with students. Sheehan and Jansen (2006) report on work undertaken to develop a bi-cultural approach to interdisciplinary training for field educators and lessons from this model could be applied to social work. This training model, called the Graduate Certificate in Clinical Teaching - Māori (GCCT-M), focused on the delivery of education in marae[4] and the use of the Māori concept of ako[5], which emphasises that the roles of teacher and learner are not mutually exclusive or hierarchical. Interestingly, the curriculum for the GCCT-M course was taken directly from the Pākehā[6] model and did not appear to incorporate kaupapa Māori[7] approaches for working with students undertaking a placement. Whilst each of these authors raise interesting challenges for field education, there is a lack of guidance for field educators about how to approach the teaching and learning task from a cultural perspective.

Professional supervision is an area of practice that is related to field education, and it is generally used as one of the primary methods for supporting student learning in social

[4] The open area in front of the meeting house, where formal greetings and discussions take place.

[5] To learn, study, teach.

[6] New Zealander of European descent.

[7] Maori approach, a philosophical doctrine, incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of Maori society.

work placements. The available examples of Māori supervision models are instructive for field education. Bradley, Jacob and Bradley (1999, p. 3) suggest that "the imperatives of Māori supervision are drawn from a Māori worldview" and emphasise ideas of supporting development rather than being superior. Cultural supervision is not only necessary for indigenous social workers but should be made available for any practitioners working with indigenous people (Eketone, 2012). Hair and O'Donoghue (2009) suggest that social work supervisors should move away from modernist ideas, which imply it is possible to develop cultural competence as an outsider, and rather adopt a posture of informed not-knowing that seeks to understand difference through critical reflection. Perhaps such an approach would make it possible for all practitioners to incorporate both Māori and Pākehā knowledge into their practice. Webber-Dreadon (1999) developed an early model of Māori supervision called *Awhiowhio,* based on the idea of a spiral that includes a number of Māori practises: karanga[8], karakia, mihimihi[9], whanaungatanga[10], whakapapa[11] kōrero[12], take[13], karakia[14], and kai[15]. In the last ten years, there has been a growing interest in Māori approaches to supervision and a number of other models have been developed. For example; the *He Kōrero Kōrari* model, using the analogy of weaving (Eruera, 2012); the *Āta* model, based on respectful relationships, negotiating boundaries and creating safe space (Lipsham, 2012); the *Hoki ki tōu maunga kia purea ai e koe ki ngā hau o Tāwhitimātea* model, incorporating the use of ancestral sites for supervision (Murray, 2012); and the *Kiaora* model based on using six traditional Māori concepts to guide practice (King, 2014). Supervision models have also been developed from a Pasifika perspective (Su'a-Hawkins & Mafile'o, 2004) and to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island practitioners (Nelson et al., 2015; Scerra, 2012). These developments in cultural supervision, and the ethical obligation to promote Māori models of practice, suggest the urgent need to develop models of field

[8] Ceremonial call, welcome call.

[9] Speech of greeting, tribute.

[10] Relationship, kinship, sense of family connection.

[11] Genealogy, lineage.

[12] Narrative, story, talk.

[13] Reason, purpose, origin.

[14] Incantation, chant, prayer.

[15] Food, meal, to eat.

education pedagogy that draw on the knowledge of indigenous people. Therefore, it is timely to seek to understand the factors that influence the process of learning and development for field educators, so that these kinds of initiatives can be catalysed.

## 1.4 Aotearoa New Zealand Context

In addition to the cultural context of Aotearoa, the political landscape also has a significant influence on social work education. National politics have been dominated by a neoliberal agenda for more than twenty-five years, leading to pressure on social workers to implement government solutions rather than adopting approaches that emphasise working alongside communities (Aimers & Walker, 2011). Neoliberalism is a social and economic agenda focused on structuring society along market lines, leading to both education and welfare being commodified (Connell, 2010). This process has resulted in a diversified social care market in Aotearoa and may actually have created new opportunities for social work (Harington & Beddoe, 2014). However, neoliberalism also places pressure on practitioners to implement punitive policies that view social problems as caused by individual rational choice rather than socio-economic pressures on families (Hyslop, 2016; O'Brien, 2016). These same pressures have impacted social work field education, resulting in this work being seen as a resource-intensive activity that keeps academics from economically valuable teaching and research, and keeps social workers from the main priorities of clinical practice (Zuchowski, Hudson, Bartlett, & Diamandi, 2014). Management emphasis on "efficiency, accountability and competition" (Aronson & Smith, 2010, p. 531), both in education and social care organisations, has led to significant pressures on the delivery of field education that result in a focus on the employability of graduates rather than educating students for social activism (George, Silver, & Preston, 2013).

Within this socio-political environment, the last decade has also seen significant changes in social work education in Aotearoa connected with the broader professionalisation journey (Beddoe, 2014). A limited voluntary registration scheme for social workers was introduced by the Aotearoa New Zealand Government from 2004 (Social Workers Registration Act, 2003) [SWRA] in response to repeated criticism of social work practice in the public sector (Beddoe & Duke, 2009). One of the powers of the SWRB was to set the level of qualification that should be required of social workers through a system of programme recognition. Some academics raised concerns that registration might jeopardise the ability of the academy to determine the curriculum

(e.g. van Heugten, 2011). Although the change to the duration of social work education did not impose a curriculum or delivery style, the longer programme requirement clearly impacts the content being covered and it could be argued that the concerns about the impact of registration have in part been realised. The Diploma of Social Work had been introduced in the 1980s but in 2006, shortly following the SWRA, this was replaced as the minimum standard by a three-year bachelor's degree. Only six years later, it was announced by the SWRB that the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) would become a four-year qualification, due, amongst other things, to concerns about consistency between the universities and other tertiary education providers, and to international transferability of the qualification (Beddoe, 2014). The increased duration of the BSW was introduced despite the fact that the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Work Educators (now the Council of Social Work Educators Aotearoa New Zealand - CSWEANZ) had raised concerns in 2007 with the Minister of Tertiary Education that there was a funding crisis in social work, due in part to the lack of recognition of the cost of field education (TEC, 2009). Interestingly, the duration of the field education component remained unchanged in the four-year BSW, despite one of the stated objectives being to improve the work readiness of graduates. The registration scheme generally increased the focus on responding to the demands of employers for graduates prepared for the realities of the workplace, thereby turning the spotlight onto the delivery of field education despite the time commitment remaining static.

The TEC investigated the challenges facing field education in a project undertaken during 2008 that explored the future of social work education and training. Unfortunately, the report of the project group, of which I was a member, was never published due to a change of government. However, the unpublished TEC report notes that "fieldwork is a major pressure point for social work programmes and for agencies" (TEC, 2009 p36). Concerns were identified in relation to inadequate funding for field education, a lack of placement sites and inconsistent quality due to a lack of common standards. Despite the difficulty of accurately mapping the demand for field education, significant growth in student numbers in recent years has undoubtedly continued to put pressure on a system already under significant strain (Hay et al., 2015). In 2008 a total of 1421 students were enrolled in the Bachelor of Social Work and a total of 996 placements were required across Aotearoa (TEC, 2009). By 2015 the total enrolments had increased to 3885 although this dropped back to 3337 in 2016 (SWRB, 2016b) following a policy change that required all programmes to be a minimum of four years.

In line with this increase in students numbers, the demand for placements peaked at 1909 in 2014 (SWRB, 2014), representing a 92% increase in six years. Interestingly, the provision of placements within statutory agencies only grew by 9% between 2008 and 2016, whereas an increase of 119% in non-government organisations was required in the same eight-year period (SWRB, 2016b; TEC, 2009). This is a concerning statistic because it shows that the brunt of the increase in demand for placements has been born by organisations that are often smaller or have fewer resources to support field educators.

Unfortunately, no significant changes resulted from the TEC project due to a change of government, although the concerns identified by the working group continued to be topics of discussion within the Field Education Sub-Committee of CSWEANZ at various times in subsequent years (K. Hay, Chair CSWEANZ Field Education Sub-Committee, personal communication, November 17, 2016). However, in recent years several significant developments have taken place that partially respond to the concerns identified in the TEC report. In 2015 the SWRB introduced a requirement that all field educators should be registered social workers or at least be eligible for registration. Then, in 2016 ANZASW undertook a project to develop a set of guidelines for field education and these included descriptions of the qualifications, responsibilities, skills and knowledge that should be expected of field educators (ANZASW, 2016). These guidelines provided a starting point for the development of an education programme that would prepare field educators for meeting the standards. ANZASW began a project at the beginning of 2017 to explore the development of a national professional development programme and accreditation scheme, intending to raise professional standards and improve the quality and consistency of field education across the country (Sandford-Reed, 2017). It is, therefore, an apposite moment in the history of social work education in Aotearoa to investigate the factors that influence the practice of field educators.

## 1.5 Research Questions

Social work education has been built on a pedagogical philosophy that values both classroom and experiential learning (Schwaber Kerson, 1994) (See 2.3, p.26). The value of combining these two teaching and learning strategies is increasingly recognised across academic disciplines, particularly due to the increasing focus on preparing graduates for the workplace (Coll & Zegwaard, 2011). Within social work, field

education is recognised as the primary mechanism through which students are prepared for the challenges inherent in practise (Boitel & Fromm, 2014), and repeated studies have found that students highly value their placement experience. Research has also shown that the relationship between the student and field educator is a critical determinant of effective learning (Bogo, 2006; Fernandez, 1998; Fortune & Abramson, 1993; Maidment, 2000b). Not only is this relationship critical, but field education more broadly is reliant on the quality of a series of partnerships involving the student, academic staff, the field educator and other colleagues. However, the role of the field educator cannot be underestimated because they co-ordinate the learning activities that the student is provided with and are a significant contributor to the assessment of student performance (Bogo et al., 2004). Understanding the factors that influence the decisions that field educators make about the teaching and learning process is therefore of critical importance.

Being an experienced practitioner within a professional discipline does not necessarily mean that a practitioner has the skills required to effectively support students on their journey to professional competence (Smith et al., 2012). Becoming a field educator is likely to involve challenge to an existing sense of professional identity, and a process of learning and development (Urdang, 1999). This is a demanding process that requires support and resources to help understand the necessary changes in knowledge, skills and values. One response to this need is to develop comprehensive education for field educators. However, my own experience of becoming an educator involved a range of other factors, such as support from experienced colleagues, which were critical in helping adopt a new professional identity. Schwaber Kerson (1994) has also convincingly argued that there are a complex set of contextual factors that influence field educator practice. Whilst field educator training may be an important ingredient for improving the quality and consistency of their practice, I began this research with an interest in investigating whether other factors may also influence actual practice with students.

Field education may be in the process of one of the most significant periods of development and change since the introduction of social work education in Aotearoa. In the evolving registration environment, there is an increasing focus on the standards for social work education including the requirements for field education. Levels of qualification and experience for field educators have been specified and the tasks of their role defined (ANZASW, 2016). This has led to the professional association

working in partnership with academics to investigate the establishment of a national training and accreditation scheme. As part of these developments, it is therefore timely to undertake an inquiry into the range of factors that might influence field educator practice. My research was not intended to cast doubt on the need for professional standards and training for field educators, but rather to complement these initiatives and support the continuous development of this important area of social work education.

In order to contribute to the development of knowledge about the practice of social work field educators, and to inform the development of field education in Aotearoa, I set out to examine the factors that influence the way this important function is carried out. My aim was to explore the work of field educators from a broad and holistic perspective, including sociocultural and historical dimensions. Rather than predetermining the factors that might be influential, I set out to uncover previously under-emphasised elements and to work with field educators to uncover new ways to catalyse the further improvement of practice. The following questions acted as a starting point and guide for my research endeavour:

- What factors do social workers in Canterbury, Aotearoa New Zealand, report as mediating their learning to practice as field educators?
- What factors do social work field educators in Canterbury, Aotearoa New Zealand, report as mediating field education practice?
- What opportunities do social work field educators in Canterbury, Aotearoa New Zealand, identify for the development of field education practice?

## 1.6 Thesis Outline

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is organised into a further seven chapters. In Chapter 2 I begin by briefly exploring the concept of professional socialisation and then examining a sample of the research literature related to field education in both social work and other professional disciplines. My discussion focuses on a number of themes in the available literature that relate to the factors influencing practice. In Chapter 3 I discuss the theoretical foundations of the research, particularly focusing on a discussion of critical pragmatism and cultural-historical activity theory (activity theory) as applied in my research. In Chapter 4 I set out the specific design of the research and explain my use of two phases of qualitative interviews followed by thematic analysis of

the data. In Chapter 5 I report the findings from my analysis of the individual interviews using the lens of activity theory. In Chapter 6 I provide the findings from the focus groups in relation to the themes of marginalisation, isolation and monoculturalism. In Chapter 7 I explain the development of a theoretical model to describe the factors influencing field education and report the recommendations made by field educators of potential professional responses to the findings of this research. Finally, in Chapter 8 I draw all of the findings and recommendations together to examine whether my original aims were met. I also suggest the contribution I have made to knowledge development in field education, both in social work and other applied disciplines.

# 2 Literature Review

In this chapter I traverse the body of literature relevant to this research. Field education is recognised as an integral part of social work education and, as discussed in the previous chapter, is considered by some to be the essential educational component that prepares students to think in ways consistent with the profession (Boitel & Fromm, 2014). In light of this, it is surprising that more significant research attention has not been specifically focused on field educator practice. However, a broad range of literature on the general topic of field education is available, and so in this chapter I examine this academic knowledge to illuminate the research questions that shaped my inquiry. I begin with an explanation of my approach to this literature review and the topics that will be discussed. I then examine the concept of profession and the factors that influence the professional socialisation process in social work, along with the implications for becoming a field educator. I then discuss similarities and differences identified both in the social work literature and in research from other field education contexts. The first topic I consider relates to factors that motivate practitioners to become field educators. I then discuss the influence of personal history and experience, before examining the training needs and methods of preparing field educators. I then explore the effectiveness of field educator training, particularly the connection between training and behaviour in practice, alongside other factors that may also be at play. The final topic I discuss is contextual factors influencing field educator practice, such as the relationships with the academic institution, employing organisation or peers.

As I stated in Chapter 1, my aim in undertaking this research was to explore the factors that influence the professional development and practice of social work field educators,

and to understand the variation in the quality and consistency of field education. My intention was to inform the development of practice by identifying the tensions, challenges and barriers faced by field educators and to explore practical ways to respond and promote change. Therefore, I explored literature related to a variety of topics relevant to field educators, such as the professional socialisation process, social workers' motivation to work with students, and their training and preparation for the role. Field educators practise within a particular structural, organisational and team context and so I also examined research related to the impact of these on practice. I, therefore, took a broad approach to identifying topics of potential relevance to social work field educators.

I also decided to look for literature outside the profession of social work. Field education is related to the broader category of work integrated learning (WIL), as a pedagogical approach that aims to integrate theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom with workplace learning experiences designed to produce the professional skills necessary for a successful career (Coll & Zegwaard, 2011). WIL is an inclusive term that subsumes a range of educational strategies that involve a partnership between a higher education institution and a workplace. Cooperative education (Davie & Russell, 1990), sandwich degrees (Brewer, 1990), internships, workplace learning, practicum, placements and fieldwork education (Patrick, Peach, & Pocknee, 2009) are all synonymous with WIL and the favoured terms vary depending on the country, professional discipline and institution.

The history of WIL goes back over a century to early sandwich courses in the UK and cooperative engineering programmes in America (Coll & Zegwaard, 2011). These were followed later by other engineering programmes established in Canada in 1957 (McCallum & Wilson, 1988) and in Australia in the early 1960s (Davie & Russell, 1990). The economic recession in the 1980s led to an increase in WIL courses in the UK aimed at preparing graduates for the realities of the workplace (Brewer, 1990). Demand has continued to grow around the world (Patrick et al., 2009) in response to a concern for a highly skilled workforce and graduates that can make an immediate contribution to the workplace (Coll & Eames, 2007). Despite this demand, WIL has traditionally suffered from a lack of research and theorisation about the actual teaching and learning process (Eames & Bell, 2005). However, a growing body of research is available to inform the delivery of WIL across disciplines. In light of these developing interdisciplinary connections, I decided to explore literature not only from the field of

social work but also from teaching, medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech pathology and dietetics. I drew on this broad body of literature to identify some of the commonalities that can provide relevant knowledge to inform this research.

I identified literature through a variety of academic databases (e.g. PsychINFO, Social Services Abstracts, Science Direct, CINAHL, Education Research Complete and ERIC) and by snowballing from the reference lists in journal articles. Due to there being limited research in some areas of interest, such as the effectiveness of field educator training, literature was included from 1980 onward, but with an emphasis on more recent studies where possible. In an attempt to capture the perspective of researchers in Aotearoa, I reviewed articles relating to field education from editions of Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work between 1996 and 2015, even though the primary topic may be only indirectly related to the central questions guiding this research. I discuss thirty articles from Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work, including a mixture of research reports and professional opinion pieces, as far as they relate to this present study.

A particular focus of researchers to date has been the examination of student satisfaction in relation to various aspects of field education (Bogo, 2006). Although student satisfaction is an important area of exploration, my primary focus relates to field educator decisions about how to practise. Students' expressed level of satisfaction with their placement is certainly one possible influence on field educators, although only indirectly related to how they practise. Other factors are therefore more likely to shape field educator practice and so I have not emphasised the literature on student satisfaction in the following discussion.

Due to the nature of social science research, including that which focuses on social work, studies often have limited scope and relatively small sample sizes, illuminating only a narrow facet of the problem. A literature review provides the opportunity to identify commonalities across a number of studies and assess the weight of evidence to inform further inquiry (Rozas & Klein, 2010). My primary objective in this chapter is, therefore, to consider the findings from research that relate to the focus of my study, to identify current knowledge and possible new directions for exploration (Thyer, 2001). Given the breadth of the central questions guiding my inquiry, I decided it was necessary to consider research with quite different objectives. Attempting to synthesise research findings from studies asking quite different questions presents significant

challenges because the concepts under discussion are likely to be quite different. To address this challenge, I used activity theory as one lens through which to examine the literature. Activity theory highlighted certain components of the work of field educators, particularly the collective and relational dimensions, and the interrelationship of different activity systems. The familiar idea, partly connected with professional socialisation, that providing field educators with comprehensive training and establishing clear competence standards is the most effective way to resolve concerns about the quality and consistency of field education, was the second lens I used to view the literature. These two perspectives were the starting point that I used to identify the themes in the literature that I discuss in the remainder of this chapter.

## 2.1 Professional socialisation

The designation of profession has historically been accorded to lawyers, doctors and the clergy (Freidson, 1983) and over time other occupations, such as social work (Flexner, 1915/2001), have sought this status. The characteristics of a profession are the subject of much debate and research reveals considerable disagreement about which traits might be considered essential or universal (Freidson, 1983). Sciulli (2005) argues that the concept and terminology of profession is specific to Anglo-American countries and has been largely ignored by European researchers. Sciulli uses this analysis as a starting point to develop an alternative definitional approach but this is contentious and debate about the value and possibility of a universally applicable definition of profession continues (Torstendahl, 2005). These continuing academic debates highlight the difficulties inherent in describing a universal typology of a profession.

In Flexner's (1915/2001) seminal speech to the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, he evaluated social work against six criteria that he proposed as essential for a profession. The criteria included individual responsibility, intellectual foundations, practical application, teachable technique, self-organisation and altruistic motivation. In Flexner's analysis, he suggested that social work failed to meet these criteria not least because of the breadth of the concerns social workers seek to address. Social work responded to this unfavourable conclusion by embarking on a professionalisation journey aimed at meeting Flexner's criteria, rather than by questioning the typology itself. One year after Flexner's speech, Edward Devine, the head of the New York Charity Organisation Society, published an article calling for the unification of caseworkers and social reformers and the establishment of professional education for

social workers (Leighninger, 2000). This same concern with the connection between higher education and status as a profession has continued to be part of the professionalisation journey for social work that can be observed in Aotearoa (Beddoe, 2013). The development in Aotearoa of tertiary education for social workers began in 1950, but questions about professional status continued and ultimately it was the advent of professional registration in 2003 that led to national standards for social work education and greater professional recognition (Beddoe, 2014). Whether social work in Aotearoa has attained the status of a profession may still depend on the definition being used.

For the purposes of my research, I have adopted a symbolic interactionist perspective on professional recognition, viewing professions in the same way as other expert occupations and focussing on the process of professional education rather than criteria for professional status (Atkinson, 1983). Whether social work in Aotearoa can be defined as a profession is therefore not a significant concern for me, but the socialising process of education, in particular, field education, is the focus of my study. Education for expert occupation, or professions, is often considered synonymous with the idea of professional socialisation, although the process begins prior to formal education and continues long after (Miller, 2010). Professional socialisation involves the development of the attitudes, interests and skills of a practitioner (Weiss, Gal, & Cnaan, 2004) and the exposure of students to the practice world during a field placement is a significant part of this process.

Field education has been a significant component of social work education in Aotearoa since its inception, with a particular focus on assisting students to integrate theory and practice (Hay et al., 2006). Despite changes in the social work curriculum, field education has also been a consistent part of professional education in America (Leighninger, 2012). Field education has been defined as the signature pedagogy of social work by the Council on Social Work Education in America, although there remains debate about this designation (Boitel & Fromm, 2014; Larrison & Korr, 2013). Field education in America has also experienced significant pressures due to organisational changes and lack of support (Bogo, 2006). In the United Kingdom, policy changes have led to a weakening of standards for field educators and therefore a potential loss of quality (Bellinger, 2010). In contrast, recent work in Aotearoa (ANZASW, 2016) established clear guidelines for field educators' competence, potentially raising standards. However, managerialism and economic rationalisation

have also created challenges for the profession (Harington & Beddoe, 2014), that may lead to resource implications for field education. Regardless of the international variations in the current political and policy climate, field education remains a significant component of social work education and therefore of the professional socialisation process.

Barretti (2004b) conducted a literature review of 29 articles that examined professional socialisation in social work and her findings were later confirmed by Miller (2010) in a slightly larger systematic review. These reviews indicate that social work research into professional socialisation has predominantly been informed by a structural-functionalist perspective that anticipated a linear process involving progressive acquisition of certain professional characteristics, particularly value positions. However, both authors identify significant areas of contradiction in the findings from the structural-functionalist research. Their reviews identify research showing that, over the course of study, students decrease in their emphasis on attitudinal perspectives that would appear core requirements of the profession. Barretti (2004b) and Miller (2010) also argue that the research generally shows that changes in values appear to be more successful in younger students but that overall the education process may, in fact, have little impact on value adoption, either because older students already have fixed views or because younger students already hold views consistent with the profession. Barretti (2004b) argues that whilst it is likely that social work education is having an impact on professional socialisation, the profession lacks measures for these changes. Elsewhere, Barretti (2004a) argues that the dimensions of professional identity are more complex than value acquisition alone and therefore exploratory research grounded in practitioner experience is necessary to capture the breadth of factors involved. She argues that although there are some examples of this kind of exploratory research, informed by a symbolic interactionist emphasis on the unofficial student views of their education, these studies have not been emphasised in the main-stream social work literature (Barretti, 2004a).

A relatively small number of studies using a symbolic interactionist perspective highlight some of the factors beyond professional training that impact on the professional socialisation of social workers. Shey (1969) argues that students appear to be socialised more strongly by their previous work experience than by their education. Barbour (1985) suggests that students negotiate a process of development which often involves hiding their professional identity due to the contested and

unpopular image of the profession. Loseke & Cahill (1986) also identify that students need to adopt an identity which is neither well defined nor well respected. They also conclude that social work students are uncomfortable with the idea of acting out a professional identity, due to concerns that this may not be truly authentic, and this reluctance to adopt an identity that is still developing may impede the socialisation process. Research conducted by Shreiber (cited in Barretti, 2004b p. 276) identifies that student peer groups can be an effective tool in supporting the professional socialisation process and can, therefore, support the objectives of academic staff. These studies appear to show that whilst professional training may be significant in the professional socialisation process, other factors are also influential. Social workers negotiate a complex professional identity formation process when they join the profession, but are then faced with further challenges when they elect to support student placements and have to decide whether to adopt the identity of a field educator.

The field educator role itself can also be thought of as another step in the professional socialisation process. Urdang (1999) identified that validation by students helped to develop the professional self-esteem of field educators, which is a critical factor in the development of professional identity. During qualitative interviews, field educators reported that supervising a student helped them to become more aware of their internalised knowledge and developing skills. Rogers (1995) suggests that training to become a field educator is an important step in the process of professional development and helped to remind practitioners that they are life-long learners. However, Urdang (1999) identified evidence that less competent students are seen as reflecting negatively on their field educator's competence and this can lead to the practitioner having feelings of self-doubt. The field educator role can, therefore, be both supportive of the professional socialisation process and also a threat or challenge that practitioners must negotiate.

In this brief review of literature related to professional socialisation in social work, there are a number of findings that relate to the central questions of my study and are therefore relevant to consider in the field education literature. Firstly, the professional socialisation process appears to begin with life experiences prior to formal study. Secondly, formal study is likely to contribute positively to some aspects of the process of adopting a social work identity but may be ineffective or even counterproductive in others. Thirdly, conflict and tensions exist as practitioners learn to adopt and contextualise their professional identity and peer support can be critical in this process.

Finally, field education can be thought of as one example of the continuation of the professional socialisation process following formal education, one that stimulates further learning and confidence as a practitioner, but is also likely to contain many of the same challenges and contradictions as the initial process of becoming a social worker. In the following review of field education literature from social work and across other professions, I identify evidence of these themes related to professional socialisation alongside other findings.

## 2.2 Motivation

It appears common across several professions for field educators to undertake the challenging role of supporting a student on placement for very little financial reward or reduction in their workload (Hasseberg, 2003; Maidment, 2000b; Rebholz, 2013). Given this fact and the challenges of adopting the identity of a field educator, it is important to understand why practitioners decide to participate in student placements. Academic staff in the dietetic profession believe that a positive attitude towards students and a desire to be a field educator are important characteristics that enable practitioners to overcome the challenges inherent in working with students (Hasseberg, 2003). The reason for this motivation to be a field educator is perhaps revealed in the tendency of dietitians to minimise the importance of financial rewards in comparison to the sense of responsibility to contribute to the profession. Maidment (2000b) reports that social workers also have a sense of professional responsibility to support students, although this may not be a primary motivator. The belief in a responsibility to give something back to the profession by supervising a student placement is also reported in occupational therapy (Thomas et al., 2007) and physiotherapy (Öhman, Hägg, & Dahlgren, 2005). However, in nursing, the sense of professional responsibility appears to be more formally imposed through job descriptions and is reinforced when a manager asks a nurse to act as a field educator (Rebholz, 2013). However, this invitation not only brings a sense of responsibility but also engenders pride and confidence when the nurse may feel unsure about taking on the role. Despite the potential for a manager's invitation to be motivating, field educators can also feel pressured to take a student even when the timing may be inappropriate due to other workload commitments (McAllister, 2001; Öhman et al., 2005). Achieving a balance between an intrinsic professional responsibility, an extrinsic professional expectation and unreasonable organisational pressure is therefore not an easy task.

Although social workers do have a sense of professional responsibility to support student learning, Maidment (2000b) reports that field educators experience tension within workplaces that do not view this work as supporting the agencies objectives. Field educators report that they find it motivating when their agency values education, when they feel that the organisation has something to offer to students and when they see that placements benefit their team (Globerman & Bogo, 2003). The presence of students within a team is a motivating force (Develin & Mathews, 2008) and possibly helps to communicate the value the organisation places on learning. On a less positive note, field educators in the UK report that a common reason for undertaking training to work with students is because their employer had nominated them (Shardlow, Nixon, & Rogers, 2002). Maidment (2000b) also reports that some social work field educators are motivated to engage students to address workload pressures and agencies can, therefore, treat students as an additional staffing resource. Employers appear to play a significant role in motivating field educators, providing a stick for some and a carrot for others.

Globerman and Bogo (2003) suggest that personal factors may be far less important than the organisational context, although some social work field educators in their study did report they were motivated by the opportunity for professional growth and by the challenge to think critically that students created. In contrast, Maidment (2000b) suggests that a primary motivator for field educators to offer placements is the critical reflection, learning and professional growth created by working with students. Similarly, Shardlow, Nixon and Rogers (2002) and Develin and Mathews (2008) report that social work field educators emphasise the professional stimulation provided by students, and in addition suggest that a desire to contribute to the development of others is a second primary motivator and reason to continue in the role. Sharing knowledge and seeing students learn are also seen as rewarding activities and part of the professionalism required by nursing field educators (Rebholz, 2013). Teachers who are field educators are also motivated by the learning and success of students and in addition value the learning that they personally gain from working with students (Trevethan, 2013). McAllister (2001) argues that a love of lifelong learning is a core aspect of the sense of self that is required to be a field educator and identifies the learning gained from working with students as a significant motivator. In a similar way, field educators in physiotherapy and occupational therapy appear to value the professional stimulation and learning they gain from working with students (Öhman et al., 2005; Thomas et al., 2007). Rosenfeld (1989) notes that practitioners appear to

commonly become field educators to relieve boredom, but this still implies that practitioners recognise and value the stimulation provided by facilitating a placement. Gaining professional status through official recognition of this informal learning may, in fact, be more motivating for field educators than financial rewards (Thomas et al., 2007). The findings from these studies, therefore, indicate that the learning that comes from working with students is both a challenge for field educators and a significant motivating factor.

## 2.3 Experiential Learning

In addition to formal learning, personal experience is also a significant influence on field education practice. Personal experience may provide an understanding of historical forms of an activity, an important part of analysis within the tradition of activity theory (Daniels, 2004). Whilst field educators may have knowledge of historical forms of field education through their experience as a student, the influence of experiential learning is broader than an awareness of how things were done in the past. When social workers begin the process of learning to be field educators they have already engaged in a learning journey and have developed their professional identity and practice experience. However, this history is challenged in the process of returning to learning and altering the perceptual stance that has served them well as a social worker (Rogers, 1995). In her comparison of field education training in the UK and Canada, Rogers (1995) argues that it is important to acknowledge the history and experience of social workers as a way of mitigating the sense of reduced competence when they begin training as a field educator. Interestingly, research with field education co-ordinators found that field educators may not be very good at remembering their own experience and what it was like to be a student on placement (Murdock, Ward, Ligon, & Jindani, 2006).

Other research suggests that field educators have strong memories of their experience as a student, both positive and negative, and these provide motivation for practice (Maidment, 2000b). Trevethan (2013) argues that the identity of field educators in teaching is informed by experience as a student, a learner, a teacher and from previous schools, mentors and personal life experience. These personal factors provide a rich source of influencing factors that shape the identity and therefore the practice of field educators. Rebholz (2013) also identified the influence of a range of sources of informal learning, including life experience prior to being a field educator, observation of a field educator whilst still a student, observation of other field educators once qualified, self-

directed learning or reading, trial and error, and experience in the role. This experiential learning may have a lasting impact on field education practice in addition to the benefits of formal training. McAllister (2001) also found evidence that field educators draw on memories of their own placements in constructing an image of what kind of practitioner they want to be. Teachers vividly recall their experience as students on placement for many years and some seek to replicate positive experiences or rectify wrongs in their own work with students (Trevethan, 2013). Critical reflection on past experience is, therefore, an extremely important part of becoming a field educator but one that may not always take place. Despite the potential dangers of uncritically allowing past experience to inform practice, or the risks of trial and error as practitioners develop their expertise, Rebholz (2013) argues that the most significant influence on the competence and self-efficacy of nursing field educators is experience working with a range of students in a variety of settings.

In qualitative interviews conducted by Urdang (1999) field educators used the metaphor of parenting when talking about working with students. Participants in this research likened learning to be a field educator to learning to be a parent because one first learns by being the subject: a child or a student. The quality of a child's experience of parenting can strongly influence their subsequent approach to being a parent, and in a similar way, the experience of field education as a student impacts on practice as a field educator. Dettlaff and Dietz (2004) found that both positive and negative experiences as a student influence motivation to be a field educator. In some cases, field educators hope to provide the same support that they were given during their placement, whilst in others, they are seeking to ensure students are protected from the kind of negative experiences that they had. Urdang (1999) suggests that working with a student can actually be an opportunity for field educators to resolve their own feelings about negative experiences whilst studying, by ensuring that new students do not face those same difficulties. Maidment (2000b) makes the point that the influence of formative childhood experience, spirituality and vulnerability of human exposure is not easily tested but in qualitative interviews found that these were recurring themes that influenced the practice of field educators.

## 2.4 Educational Needs

Several authors argue that social work field educators require specialist training to work with students (e.g. Abramson & Fortune, 1990; Doueck & Kasper, 1991; Knight, 2001;

Maidment, 2002; Moorhouse, Hay, & O'Donoghue, 2014; Rogers, 1995, 1996) and this was part of the challenge posed by Fulcher (2008) to social work educators in Australia and New Zealand almost 30 years ago. Field education co-ordinators believe field educators struggle to differentiate between their role as a social worker and as an educator (Murdock et al., 2006), and Maidment (2002) reports that field educators in Aotearoa are generally not drawing on educational theory to inform their role. The transition from one role to the other is therefore challenging and requires learning educational skills that do not naturally develop within social work practice (Knight, 2001), a process that is possibly as challenging as adopting a professional identity (Holtz Deal & Clements, 2006). Rogers and McDonald (1992) argue convincingly that "It is unreasonable to expect that practitioners will use teaching methods and processes that are functional, effective, and appropriate for the supervision and evaluation of developing professionals without first having received specialized [sic] training or done preparatory course work" (p. 166).

Within the medical profession, field educators appear to often have specific qualifications related to working with students and identify that they have particular expertise in principles of teaching, communication skills training, motivating learning and student assessment (Huwendiek et al., 2010). However, it is common for field educators from other professions to start working with students prior to receiving any training (Hasseberg, 2003; McAllister, 2001; Rebholz, 2013). This can lead to a lack of confidence and uncertainty about being able to provide what is required by the student or academic institution. Even teachers who are field educators report that they feel unprepared for the role, and that experience as a student and teacher is insufficient preparation for being a field educator (Trevethan, 2013). Rebholz (2013) found that nursing field educators can experience a sense of being an impostor even after many years of working with students, but noted that formal training can ameliorate this experience.

A significant concern for field education co-ordinators is the apparent difficulty that field educators have in assisting students to integrate theory and practice, and in one study they identified this as the most significant training need (Murdock et al., 2006). Field educators in Scotland identified their role as being focused on teaching students to integrate theory and practice but acknowledged that they found it hard to keep up to date with research and theory development (Clapton et al., 2006). These concerns are reflected in some of the training needs identified by field educators in America.

Participants in two focus groups identified the need for training in the mission and purpose of field education, the programme structure and expectations, the knowledge and skills to be covered in the placement, teaching methods, using teachable moments and integrating theory and practice (Dettlaff & Dietz, 2004). Whilst these findings are limited by the small scale of the study, similar needs were identified by field educators in Australia and later incorporated into a 35-hour course (Fernandez, 2003). Participants in this study identified a need for learning about supervision theory, designing placements as learning experiences, student and field educator relationships, expectations and outcomes for each placement, adult learning theory, assessment of students, working with disabilities, integration of theory and practice, and current social work theory (Fernandez, 2003). The currently available evidence suggests that field educators identify a range of training needs but consistently identify a concern with teaching students to integrate theory and practice, arguably a core part of field education.

In a small New Zealand qualitative study, field educators also identified their lack of knowledge and skills in teaching and learning as their key area of difficulty in working with students, which was exacerbated by a lack of training and preparation (Ellis, 1998). Field educators in dietetics, speech pathology and nursing have all expressed concerns about not having the teaching skills required to work with students on placement and uncertainty about expectations of their role (Hasseberg, 2003; McAllister, 2001; Rebholz, 2013). Despite field educators in the medical profession noting their expertise in teaching and assessment, approximately one fifth identify a training need in principles of teaching and almost one third in assessment (Huwendiek et al., 2010). Specialist skills such as specific research methodologies, teaching with computer-based technology, curriculum design and curriculum evaluation are also identified as professional development needs by doctors in this study.

A significant aspect of teaching and learning is the process of educational assessment, which is another area of weakness for social workers identified by field education co-ordinators in America (Murdock et al., 2006). Vinton and Wilke (2011) also found, in their study of leniency bias when assessing students on placement, that field educators consistently evaluate students above average, possibly indicating a misconception that an honest evaluation will be seen as critical. Indeed, students were more critical of their own competence than their field educators. Hasseberg (2003) identifies adult learning methods and learning and personality styles as areas in which dietitian field educators

feel they lack knowledge, along with feeling unprepared for giving feedback or teaching time management and professionalism. Rebholz (2013) also notes that nursing field educators find educational assessment and giving students feedback to be major challenges. Interestingly, the challenge of giving effective feedback and of contributing to assessment was also identified by field educators in teaching (Trevethan, 2013). Even though teachers might be expected to be experienced in giving feedback, they find this challenging in the context of a placement because of a lack of clarity around identifying the next developmental stage that students should be aiming to attain.

Although field educators identify training as the solution to perceived weaknesses in teaching and learning, some of the associated skills remain a concern even after training. For example, skills in student assessment, particularly of those who may be failing, is an area in which social work field educators lack confidence even when they have had training or experience in the role (Waterhouse, McLagan, & Murr, 2011). Hasseberg (2003) suggests that professional training for dietician field educators, or at least some written educational material, is required to address the gap in their preparation. However, the effectiveness of professional development training or other ways of stimulating this learning are not explored in Hasseberg's study. Research shows that field educators lack confidence and competence in the educational aspects of their role, including in critical skills related to participating in the formal assessment process. Although training is identified as essential to address this gap in competence, education may not address all of the issues, at least in relation to some skills such as assessment. If such a key skill for being an educator is problematic even for trained field educators, then the learning process required to transition from social worker to field educator appears to be a complex non-linear one.

## 2.5 Training Approaches

Examples of field educator training that have been the focus of empirical research range both in duration and in whether the learning objectives are focused on procedural issues, broad teaching principles or specialised areas of practice. Gourdine and Baffour (2004) evaluated an example of an eight-hour training course that sought to address the competency standards developed by the Council of Social Work Education, which might be contrasted with the 150-hour Practice Teacher Award that was developed in the UK (Rogers, 1996). Both of these examples of training were designed to develop knowledge of the curriculum and assessment processes and also address the broad

competencies required to be an effective educator. Abramson and Fortune (1990) also describe a ten-session training course that addressed both procedural issues and educational principles, with a particular focus on process recordings as a teaching and learning tool. Collaboration between programmes to provide this kind of core field educator training can lead to efficiencies of scale and ensure common knowledge and standards (Berg-Weger, Rochman, Rosenthal, Sporleder, & Birkenmaier, 2007). Emerson (2004) suggests that core educator competencies could even be taught on an inter-professional basis, although there are challenges related to mutual professional trust that have to be overcome (Frost, Leonard, & Boran, 2004). An alternative to the core competence training approach is to provide field educators with specialist training in areas such as single system research design (Doueck & Kasper, 1991), critical thinking skills (Rogers & McDonald, 1992), group assignments (Cohen, 1998), management of power dynamics and conflict resolution (Power & Bogo, 2003), diversity issues (Armour, Bain, & Rubio, 2004), student developmental stages (Holtz Deal & Clements, 2006), assessment skills (Vinton, & Wilke, 2011) and student attachment styles (Bennett, Mohr, Deal, & Hwang, 2013). The variety and range of approaches to the preparation of field educators found in the literature suggests an issue based rather than comprehensive approach to training field educators. However, it also indicates a concern within the social work profession that the task of working with students on placement is a complex and challenging one that requires the development of knowledge and skills beyond those required for professional practice.

Whilst the literature provides examples of social work field educator training designed to develop teaching and learning competence and other areas of specialist skill, there is evidence that the majority of practitioners receive limited preparation, generally focused on programme expectations and procedural issues. McChesney (1998) conducted a national survey of field education co-ordinators in America as part of her doctoral research into the training provided for field educators. She found that although the majority of institutions provided both orientation and further professional development events for field educators, only a relatively brief (commonly four hours) initial orientation, focused on procedural issues, was mandatory before working with students. These findings were echoed by a more recent survey of field education co-ordinators that found that although the vast majority of academic institutions in America provide orientation or further professional development for field educators, only 26% have consequences for not attending orientation, such as not receiving students, and even less

(16%) for not attending ongoing training (Dalton, Stevens, & Maas-Brady, 2009). In Aotearoa, Maidment (2000b) found that the majority of field educators had only completed introductory training with only 4% completing in-depth training. Although further professional development training was available, less than one third took up these opportunities and practitioners identified time and workload pressures as the major barriers to attendance. These findings highlight the potential for students to frequently be placed with field educators who have not been provided with the opportunity to spend the time necessary to develop their competence as educators and negotiate the professional socialisation process. Dalton, Stevens and Maas-Brady (2009) also argue that mandatory training and consequences for non-attendance is only a sustainable strategy in an environment where there is an oversupply of field educators. CCETSW attempted to address similar concerns in the UK when they introduced the Practice Teacher Award in 1989 and planned that in time all students would be supervised by a qualified field educator (Rogers, 1996). However, this ambition was not realised due to pressures on supply and demand, and more recent developments in the post-qualification award scheme have resulted in a situation where field educators with minimal preparation are given responsibility for teaching social work students (Bellinger, 2010).

In research comparing training for field educators in the UK and Canada, Rogers (1995) found that practitioners learn in a number of different ways, some of which can be easily incorporated into formal training programmes and others that require more creative planning. Active learning teaching methods have been evaluated positively by field educators and appeared to be an effective method for field education training (McChesney & Euster, 2000). This is consistent with what is known about the preferences of adult learners. A model of training using mutual peer support also appears to show potential and was evaluated positively by participants, although Finch and Feigelman (2008) provide few details about how this evaluation was conducted. However, similarly positive feedback to peer group based training was reported by Bogo and Power (1995) following use of a postal survey. A web-based questionnaire of field educators found support for online training, although most saw a disadvantage in not having a face to face component (Dedman & Palmer, 2011). Whilst these findings indicate the potential for the mass delivery of cheap standardised training, caution should be exercised because the research participants were likely to already be disposed to web-based resources, hence their completion of the survey, and this particular study

did not explore the actual take up or effectiveness of the training. What these studies do appear to show is that field educators learn in a variety of ways, some of which have been evaluated but presumably others have not. One approach to training and preparation for field educators is therefore unlikely to be effective, and multiple strategies will be necessary to improve the quality of placements.

The length of training courses for field educators appears to be directly related to their self-confidence and sense of preparation for the role (Waterhouse et al., 2011). However, this effect diminishes as field educators gain experience, possibly indicating that competence and confidence are a combination of both training and experience. Fook, Ryan and Hawkins (2000) have argued that newly qualified professionals rely on the deliberative and conscious application of context-free rules but as they become more experienced they develop the ability to practice in more intuitive ways. These findings suggest that whilst training plays an important part in the development of self-efficacy for field educators, experience in working with students and the opportunity to develop context-specific knowledge and skills are at least as significant, if not more so.

Providing support to remote field educators requires innovative approaches to training and support. Unger (2003) describes two approaches to supporting field educators in rural settings in America. The first approach involved informal lunchtime meetings with both students and field educators, in which a number of topics related to learning, supervision, assessment and curriculum were covered. These meetings were later replaced with an on-campus structured orientation programme and professional development events. Although participants identified orientation and training as valuable they also noted that it could be difficult to attend meetings in person (Unger, 2003). Field educators in rural settings in Australia were provided with an 18-week programme concurrent to placement, which involved email, phone and teleconference modes of support (Taylor, Mensinga, Casey, & Caldwell, 2008). Whilst participants found the programme useful, a significant minority (43%) did not think it had actually changed their practice with students. The focus of any field educator training or support programme is clearly the improvement of practice with students and so it is a concern if this link cannot be demonstrated, regardless of which form the programme is provided in.

## 2.6 Accreditation

Whilst there have been numerous examples of orientation and training programmes provided for social work field educators, the UK appears to be the only country to institute a national training and accreditation scheme. The Practice Teacher Award (Practice Teacher is the terminology used for field educators in the UK) was introduced in 1989 by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) in response to concerns about the quality of social work education, in particular, the field education component (Slater, 2007). The original intent of CCETSW was that students would complete their placements in social service agencies accredited to provide field education and with practitioners who had gained the Practice Teacher Award (Bellinger, 2010). These requirements were intended to be enforced incrementally, and initially, field educators did not have to hold the Practice Teacher Award or even be a qualified social worker (Slater, 2007). However, due to the pressure of limited placement availability the field education requirements did not get upgraded as had been promised (Bellinger, 2010).

The Practice Teacher Award involved a total of 150 hours of study exploring issues related to social work field education, adult learning, principles and practice of field education, supervision methods, and assessment and evaluation (Rogers, 1996). The training was, therefore, a considerable commitment for field educators and employers. However, the award was instrumental in raising the professional status of field education in the UK and contributed to the development of the knowledge base available to inform practice (Slater, 2007) and the competence and confidence of field educators (Rogers, 1996). This is consistent with findings from an evaluation of a localised professional development and accreditation scheme in Northern Ireland (Douglas & Magee, 2012), which concluded that the scheme improved the quality of placements and raised practitioner competence.

In 2002 a new Bachelor of Social Work was introduced in the UK with all students required to spend 200 days in supervised practice, creating an increased demand for field educators (Waterhouse et al., 2011). When the General Social Care Council (GSCC) later reviewed the post-qualifying scheme that they had inherited from CCETSW they found a proliferation of awards and funding structures (Slater, 2007). The post-qualifying award structure was therefore overhauled and despite the strengths of the Practice Teacher Award, it was disestablished. A generic approach was

introduced that embedded field education into each of the three levels of the post-qualifying scheme, introducing the idea that all social workers should be involved in the process of contributing to the development of future practitioners (Bellinger, 2010). Employers were made responsible for the provision of placements, without an accreditation process to ensure quality, although later a set of practice education standards were introduced that stipulated the qualifications and experience required to work with students on placement (Department for Education. Social Work Reform Board, 2010).

The history of the Practice Teacher Award illustrates the potential benefits of accreditation and quality training. However, Bellinger (2010) argues that these benefits can be easily lost due to the influence of policy changes driven by concerns about cost and the availability of placements. Maidment (2001) argues that these macro influences are just as important as the micro organisational or personal factors that impinge on the context of field education. Some of these influences are just as evident in Aotearoa as Bellinger (2010) argues has been the case in the UK.

Following the introduction of the Social Workers Registration Act (2003) in Aotearoa, there was concern about the inconsistent quality of field education, insufficient availability of field educators and uneven geographical distribution of placements (Perry & Maher, 2003). These concerns prompted a collaboration between the government agency for child protection, Child Youth and Family Services[16], and the Council for Social Work Education Aotearoa New Zealand (CSWEANZ) to develop a national protocol for field education. This protocol provided guidelines for good practice, pre-requisites for placements, field educator requirements and problem-solving processes (Perry & Maher, 2003). The protocol included objectives for field educator training, recognition and continued professional development but these did not materialise, possibly due to the cost implications rather than a lack of good will. Recently ANZASW and CSWEANZ have developed a set of guidelines (ANZASW, 2016) that set out the responsibilities, knowledge and skills of field educators with the intention that these could be used to develop appropriate training packages. The language of these

[16] The Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki (MVCOT) took over responsibility for delivering child protection services from Child Youth and Family in April 2017.

guidelines is intentionally cautious, stating that "while the establishment of guidelines does strengthen accountability in field education, these are designed to be aspirational in nature rather than directive, with the pursuit of quality field education continuing to be an ongoing endeavour within social work as a profession" (ANZASW, 2016, p. 3). This language implies that the professional association is concerned about unintended consequences of national standards for field education, such as the cost of training and the potential loss of field educators. However, as part of the ongoing development of the registration scheme, the SWRB have incorporated these guidelines into the programme recognition standards (SWRB, 2016a), suggesting that they could take on a regulatory function in the future. This development highlights the influence of structural factors on the provision of field education and the potential for increasing scrutiny of field educator practice. Complex structural factors clearly influence the provision of field education and ultimately the practice of field educators is profoundly shaped by policy decisions outside of the control of individual practitioners.

## 2.7 Training Effectiveness

Few empirical studies have been completed that evaluate the effectiveness of social work field educator training and those available often have limitations due to a reliance on qualitative research designs, the use of satisfaction as a measure, or evaluation tools that have untested reliability and validity (Bogo, 2006). However, research into field educator training that used active learning techniques (McChesney & Euster, 2000) or mutual peer support (Finch & Feigelman, 2008) have both been evaluated positively by participants. Evaluation research involving the use of control groups has also shown that training can improve field educators' integration of theory and practice, application of skill-based knowledge, socialisation of students, management of the student experience (Gourdine & Baffour, 2004), support for student work, provision of feedback, use of theory (Holtz Deal & Clements, 2006), critical thinking (Rogers & McDonald, 1992), confidence in discussing research design (Doueck & Kasper, 1991), and comfort exploring issues of diversity or oppression (Armour et al., 2004). An early example of an evaluation of field educator training reports that participants were more likely to use process recordings, use feedback and link to practice models than practitioners who did not attend the training (Abramson & Fortune, 1990). Following a 35-hour field educator course in Australia, the course participants recognise the importance of a teaching orientation and report that the training develops their knowledge of educational

concepts (Fernandez, 2003). A more recent study in America by Detlaff (2008) used an interesting methodology to test whether completing the six modules of training led to behaviour change. Participants were asked to complete an action plan following the training and then report two months later on whether they had implemented the identified behaviours. Detlaff reports that two-thirds of the action plans were implemented and that pre and post surveys identified increased knowledge of field education practice, although these findings were not compared to a control group. Despite inherent limitations in the chosen research designs, the available evaluations of field educator training are promising and certainly show that practitioners value the learning and report increased knowledge and confidence.

Although many research studies report positive evaluations of field educator training programmes, the findings also raise questions about the other factors impacting practitioner decisions about the teaching and learning methods to use with students. The available studies either raise questions about the barriers to behavioural change in a significant minority of cases (Abramson & Fortune, 1990; Dettlaff, 2008), fail to demonstrate any impact on the actual practice of field educators (Fernandez, 2003; Finch & Feigelman, 2008; McChesney & Euster, 2000; Rogers & McDonald, 1992) or show that students evaluate the competence of field educators who had attended training as similar to those who do not (Gourdine & Baffour, 2004). Deal and Clements (2006) report that their training course had mixed effects on field educator behaviour, with some positive results but no change in the field education methods used by participants. Bennett, Mohr, Deal and Hwang (2013) also suggest that training in attachment styles improves field educators' ability to develop a working alliance with students but does not impact their ability to work more effectively with attachment styles. In one study, field educators who received training in research design were actually found to be less likely to undertake research or support a student to do so, even though they reported greater confidence in discussing research design (Doueck & Kasper, 1991). Despite the small scale of this study, it raises some interesting questions about the range of influences on field educator behaviour that go beyond formal training. Even in the context of the UK nationally recognised qualification for field educators, which is more comprehensive than most training, no link between student satisfaction and whether field educators had completed the training for the Practice Teacher Award has been demonstrated (Walker, McCarthy, Morgan & Timms, cited in Rogers, 1996, p. 274). Abramson and Fortune (1990) comment on this issue and suggest that it may be

difficult to identify behavioural differences following field educator training “if the likelihood of engaging in certain supervisory activities is based on common sense and past professional experience rather than on training" (p. 284).

The findings from a range of studies undertaken in a variety of contexts suggest that although training may be helpful for improving the confidence of field educators and their competence with certain skills, the influences on practitioner behaviour and actual practice with students are likely to be far more complex than a linear relationship between training and practice. One example of other factors impacting field education practice is provided by Rogers and McDonald (1995) from their study of teaching methods used in placements. They found that field educators select educational methods for reasons of expediency and are more focused on getting the job done than pedagogical principles. Perhaps a range of other factors are also at play or more sophisticated research methodology is required to establish the relationship between training and practice.

Deal, Bennett, Mohr and Hwang (2011) describe the rare use of a randomised controlled trial to evaluate field educator training, a methodology generally considered more robust than that used in the studies already discussed. The research explored the effect on student competence and the supervisory alliance of training in the developmental-relational approach to field education. Five evaluation tools that had been previously tested for reliability and validity were used in this quantitative study. The research findings indicate that training had a positive impact on field educators’ assessment of students’ developing competence and the supervisory alliance. However, these findings were not replicated in the student evaluations of their own competence or the supervisory alliance. The researchers suggest that the measurement tool to assess students’ self-assessment of competence may not have been sensitive enough. However, in relation to the assessment of supervisory alliance, the authors note that the training possibly sensitised field educators to the importance of their relationship with students but may not have actually changed their behaviour (Deal, et al., 2011). It could be argued that a similar dynamic may have taken place in relation to the assessment of student competence, with field educators scoring their students more positively because of their participation in the training. Vinton and Wilke (2011) also suggest that field educators have a tendency to rate student competence more highly than students themselves, casting doubt on whether the training provided by Deal et al. (2011) actually improved field educators’ practice and ability to teach more effectively. Despite

the robust nature of the research undertaken by Deal et al., questions remain about the relationship between training programmes and actual field educator behaviour. Whilst comprehensive training may be extremely beneficial, other factors are likely to be significant contributors to the approach field educators' use when working with students. Maidment (2001) has argued that field education is shaped by a complex and dynamic interaction of relationships between students, field educators, academic staff, employers, managers and professional colleagues.

## 2.8 Student Relationships

Research into student satisfaction with field education has shown that the relationship with the field educator is critically important (Fernandez, 1998; Fortune et al., 1985; Moorhouse et al., 2014). Field educators in teaching identify that experiencing relational difficulties when working with students can be a barrier to decisions to continue in the role (Trevethan, 2013). However, teachers appear to assume that positive relationships with students are the result of a good matching process rather than a consequence of field educator behaviour. A similar emphasis on the matching process has been found with dietitian field educators who report that open sharing of information about the student is an important aspect of a successful placement (Hasseberg, 2003). This may indicate that field educators are concerned to avoid working with students with certain characteristics. For example, nursing field educators have reported concerns about working across generational boundaries (Rebholz, 2013). However, the weight of research evidence indicates that field educators simply value open information sharing to assist them in establishing strong working relationships from the beginning of the placement. Research with field educators in speech pathology has shown that they are influenced by humanistic values that emphasise the importance of relationships with students, maintaining open communication and honest sharing of self (McAllister, 2001). These same values are also evident in the concern amongst field educators to respond to concerns about student wellbeing rather than simply focus on their learning needs. This broad concern with student needs can lead to stress for some field educators, whilst others struggle with a psychological need to be liked by students (McAllister, 2001). Relationships with students can, therefore, influence the work of field educators in both positive and negative ways, clearly, a significant factor impacting the quality of field education.

Interestingly, the quality of the relationship between the field educator and student may be more significantly shaped by the skills of the field educator and the teaching methods used during the placement, rather than the personal characteristics of either party (Knight, 1996; Maidment, 2001). Aotearoa students identify a number of relational factors that impacted on their experience of field education and their level of confidence in challenging examples of field educator poor practice. For example, students identify that the degree to which the field educator shares power, the perception of cultural authority and the existence of a prior relationship are all important factors in their field education experience (Moorhouse et al., 2014).

Relationships with students are also important for field educators but from quite a different perspective. Rosenfeld (1989) suggests that field educators are more likely to decide not to continue providing placements if they believe a previous student had unsatisfactory knowledge or skills because this results in significant additional workload. Rosenfeld's research indicates that field educators do not make distinctions between degrees of good or bad in respect of students, but rather categorise students as one or the other. These findings highlight both the significance and fragility of the relationship between the central field education actors. Field educators may fail to utilise certain pedagogical tools, or students may not demonstrate satisfactory knowledge and skill, both resulting in a breakdown of the relationship. The implications of this breakdown are likely to be significant for both the student and field educator, potentially impacting future placements.

A number of differences may exist between the priorities that students and field educators emphasise in respect of the teaching role (Hagen, 1989). For example, students emphasise the importance of orientation activities and the field educator acting as an advocate for the student. In contrast, field educators emphasise the importance of the process of selecting students and assessing their competence to practice. Pack (2011) also argues that students and field educators can have quite different perceptions of the challenges and focus of field education supervision. Whilst these differences may not necessarily be problematic, they highlight the potential for relational breakdown during a placement. The relational aspect of the field education process is therefore likely to play a significant role in shaping how field educators actually work with students.

## 2.9 Academy Relationships

Literature from Aotearoa illustrates some of the procedural issues used by academic institutions that play a part in field education. For example, Apaitia-Vague (2011) discusses the criteria for determining whether students meet the character requirements necessary to ensure client safety during a placement. Hanlen (2011) also discusses a related concern about what information should be shared with social service managers prior to a placement commencing. Managing the interface with the organisational site of field education is a significant concern for academic institutions, along with considerations about how to effectively support field educators. Douglas (2011) describes the development of a collection of previously published teaching resources that can be used by academic institutions to support their field educators. These teaching resources could be considered complementary to adult learning principles and other teaching and learning methods that institutions may want field educators to utilise. For example, Maidment (1997) discusses the use of learning contracts, case studies, process recordings and structured feedback to support student learning. Whilst academic institutions may hope that field educators will adopt these educational methods, the lack of academic recognition of field education (Joyce, 1998) suggests that there are significant tensions between the practice and academic worlds that may inhibit the development of educationally focused practitioners.

Field educators need support to negotiate the transition from practitioner to educator and to operate effectively at the interface of academic institutions and social service agencies. Urdang (1999) argues that field liaison staff are in a position to offer this support so field educators can cope with the challenges and professional growth associated with their role. She suggests that the required support should go beyond liaison visits to evaluate student learning and include an engagement in the process of field educators learning to be educators. Field educator satisfaction has been shown to be related to access to information about evaluations undertaken during field liaison visits, the willingness of academic staff to provide consultation and the frequency of contact with academic staff (Bogo, 2006). Rosenfeld (1989) found that the frequency of telephone or face to face visits by liaison academic staff is directly related to satisfaction with the relationship with the academic institution. Whilst this support might be most effectively undertaken face to face, field educators have identified telephone mentoring provided by academic staff as a helpful method of providing support (Rosenfeld, 1989; Taylor et al., 2008). However, group contacts or email correspondence are not

associated with positive reports of relationships with the academic institution (Rosenfeld, 1989). Studies appear to show that academic staff have a significant influence on the practice of field educators and that the form of support they provide can have both a positive and negative effects.

Although field educators value the support that can be provided by field liaison staff, they have reported a lack of feedback about the quality of their teaching practice (Barlow, Rogers, & Coleman, 2004). Waterhouse, McLagan and Murr (2011) found that despite positive feedback about training and information manuals provided by the academic institutions, field educators felt unsupported by academic staff in other aspects of the placement. This not only included the liaison function but also the assessment systems and paperwork requirements for the student evaluation, which were seen as barriers for field educators. Cooper (1998) has pointed out that there is a significant tension associated with students who fail their placement since this outcome could be viewed as the responsibility of the student, field educator or academic institution depending on the perspective taken. There is a risk that academic staff may view a failed placement as an indication of the field educator's poor teaching skills, whilst on the other hand, the field educator may believe that poor preparation or allocation of the student are the responsibility of the academy.

Field educators in New Zealand have reported that a lack of support from academic staff can be a trigger for not offering further placements and identified the liaison function as an area needing improvement (Maidment, 2000b). In teaching, there can be tension between field education practice and the academic institution, and field educators indicate that academic staff do not fully appreciate the current realities of practice. An extensive practice audit in Scotland found that field educators felt unsupported by the academy because academic staff were seen as out of touch with the realities of practice (Clapton et al., 2006). The authors of this study suggest that field education needs to be re-imagined to find ways to develop stronger partnerships between academic institutions and social service agencies and to locate teaching in the context of practice rather than in the classroom. Öhman, Hägg and Dahlgren (2005) report mutual distrust between field educators and academic staff in physiotherapy; academic staff in this research believed field educators were not up to date with research and were too focused on practice skills, whilst field educators believed academic staff were distant from practice and too influenced by a medical discourse and theoretical ideas. Trevethan (2013) conceptualises this tension between field educators and the academy in a model

of field education that contains a series of interlocking systems and notes that the academic institution can either act as a significant support or alternatively be critical of field educators and, therefore, act as a hurdle for practitioners to overcome. Findings from research in New Zealand suggests that field educators believe their relationship with the academic institution is critical to achieving the aims of the placement (Hay et al., 2006), reinforcing the idea that the relationship with the academy is a significant influence on practice.

## 2.10 Organisational Context

Literature from Aotearoa provides examples of innovation and a variety of different approaches to the context in which field education takes place. For example, the option to have a placement in the student's workplace has been identified as important for some employers (Perry & Maher, 2003) and a review of such placements in Aotearoa, Australia and Canada concluded that despite the challenge of ensuring learning is protected these kinds of placements can be valuable learning experiences (Noble, Heycox, O'Sullivan, & Bartlett, 2007). Hay and Teppett (2011) describe the development and demise of a student unit, a model common across Aotearoa in the 1980s, in which one field educator supports several students across different teams within one organisation. Despite positive feedback from evaluations of the reintroduction of a student unit, Hay and Teppett report that this could not prevent its closure due to organisational restructuring. Douglas (2007) describes her experience as a Masters student undertaking evaluation research during her field education placement, recommending this as a commendable experience for learning to integrate theory and practice. This idea has been taken further in two other Aotearoa projects that developed research-based field education as a partnership between academic institutions and social service agencies with the aim of creating a community of practice centred on research activity (Maidment, Chilvers, Crichton-Hill, & Meadows-Taurua, 2011; Appleton, Rankine, & Hare, 2016). Along with the types of work undertaken, there are examples in the literature of different organisational contexts. For example, Wheeler and Simmons (Wheeler & Simmons, 2009) describe the experience of completing a placement in a high school setting, providing several examples of community development activities completed and learning gained in the process. Research in Australia also supports the value of social work placements in school settings and suggests that field educators need to be skilled in making connections between social

work and the community development approach often required in such placements. In a follow-up article, Wheeler and Simmons (2010) describe the importance of understanding learning styles and the critical nature of supervision during the field education process in a school. Culturally appropriate supervision is particularly important in Māori agencies or with Māori students and a number of models have been published in the literature (Elkington, 2014; Eruera, 2012; Lipsham, 2012; Murray, 2012). Although none of these models have been specifically applied to the field education context, they provide a useful starting point for thinking about placements in Māori agencies or with Māori students. This range of literature from Aotearoa illustrates the significant influence of the organisational milieu and the variety of contexts in which field education takes place, making it clear that one single approach to the teaching and learning exchange would not be appropriate.

The political pressures on welfare organisations also impact on field education delivery. George, Silver and Preston (2013) argue that the current field education model fails to challenge the neoliberal status quo because of the focus on placements within an existing agency framework, rather than as a partnership with a community. Neoliberal ideology has resulted in agencies giving low priority to supporting field education because it distracts practitioners away from productivity objectives (Morley & Dunstan, 2013). Workload pressures for social workers also negatively impact their capacity for providing field education (Zuchowski et al., 2014) and, in an environment with significant funding pressures, the ability of organisations to offer student placements is hampered (Hickson, Theobald & Long, 2015). George, Silver and Preston (2013) suggest that a critical rethinking of field education is necessary, a sentiment echoed by Morley and Dunstan (2013) who propose critical practice as a counter to neoliberal ideas.

In this neoliberal organisational environment, field educators are faced with a juggling act, trying to manage the needs of clients against the learning demands of students (McAllister, 2001). This tension is a reflection of the fact that field educators are, first and foremost, practitioners working within agencies that are focused on managing scarce resources to meet the needs of clients rather than meeting the learning objectives of students. Agencies are faced with economic realities that may result in students simply being viewed as a resource to be utilised or a demand on limited staff time (Jarman-Rohde, McFall, Kolar, & Strom, 1997, p. 32). Pack (2011) also argues that agencies often see field education as a process of quality assurance, viewing students as

a risk to be managed. Maidment (2000b) argues that the prevailing economic-rationalist ideology in Aotearoa leads to students being seen either as a burden or alternatively as free labour. In this kind of climate field educators have reported hiding the realities of their work with students from their manager, no doubt in part because the majority of field educators in Aotearoa lack an official mandate for this work (Maidment, 2001). These research findings highlight that field education creates tensions within social service agencies because of an economically framed cost-benefit analysis and risk-averse culture.

Studies report increasing pressures on social work field educators due to organisational changes and a lack of support for field education (Bogo, 2006). Practitioners in Aotearoa report that field education is an area of work that organisations view as expendable when there is pressure on resources (Ellis, 1998). This may not be the case in all organisations since Maidment (2000b) found that field educator opinions about the level of support from their employer represented a fairly even spread. However, the evidence suggests that organisational pressures can create tensions between the objectives of the academy, focused on student learning, and those of the hosting social service agency, focused on carefully managing scarce resources whilst still providing quality services to clients. "Organizational [sic] pressures for productivity and 'cheap labour' can conflict with the educational purpose of the field placement" (Jarman-Rohde et al., 1997, p. 32). A similar concern was raised by field educators in Scotland who reported feeling unsupported by their employers, in part due to a lack of commitment to learning within the organisation (Clapton et al., 2006). In some contexts, students are seen as a drain on scarce resources (Torry, Furness, & Wilkinson, 2005). These findings suggest that social service agencies that offer placements may not be focused on learning and educational objectives but rather on current or future labour resources. In occupational therapy, organisations are often focused on future recruitment or the potential for students to complete projects that help with workload issues (Thomas et al., 2007). Concerns about future recruitment led to the development of a national protocol for social work field education in Aotearoa (Perry & Maher, 2003) and yet a later national survey of field educators and students found that they were not focused on recruitment as an aim of field education (Hay et al., 2006).

The impact of organisational issues, such as workload or staff turnover, can be significant and may limit the effectiveness of any training or preparation that field educators undertake (Dettlaff, 2008; Doueck & Kasper, 1991). Waterhouse, McLagan

and Murr (2011) conducted a survey and interviews with 42 social work field educators in the UK to explore the support needs that practitioners identify as important and the perceived availability of those forms of assistance. A significant finding was that field educators value support provided by their manager and their employing organisation. Interestingly, nursing field educators find that managers frequently do not know what the role of a field educator involves and therefore fail to provide adequate support (Rebholz, 2013). This extends to other members of the multidisciplinary team, such as medical staff, further exacerbating the barriers to field education created within the organisational context. Rosenfeld's (1989) earlier survey of 327 social work field educators in America found that release time, office space and administration support all contributed to an increased sense of status, which in turn positively impacted satisfaction with the role. However, although these practical supports can be very beneficial for field educators, they are not always available in organisations with stretched resources.

Participants in the research undertaken by Waterhouse, McLagan and Murr (2011) gave mixed reports about the availability of organisational supports and identified workload pressures and lack of time as significant barriers to their work with students. Rosenfield (1989) identifies workload as the most common factor in deciding to not offer a student placement. Hasseberg (2003) found that time pressure is the central issue of concern for dietetic field educators because of the expectation that they will support student learning in addition to maintaining their normal clinical workload. Huwendiek et al. (2010) found that more than 20% of doctors report time pressures and lack of organisational support as significant challenges for their work. A similar concern about the barriers created by limited resources, lack of time and workload was identified with physiotherapists (Öhman et al., 2005), occupational therapists (Thomas et al., 2007) and with nurses (Rebholz, 2013). Physiotherapists noted that managers are generally supportive of field education in principle but this does not extend to prioritising this work or adjusting workload calculations (Öhman et al., 2005). These findings are echoed in social work research from Aotearoa in which 68% of participants noted that they had declined to offer a placement at some point due to workload pressure (Maidment, 2000b), and also in consultation that identified reduced workload as one of the most relevant forms of professional recognition (Perry & Maher, 2003) and a barrier to achieving the aims of field education (Hay et al., 2006). Field educators in Maidment's (2000b) study also noted that there was a lack of interest from their

manager unless there were problems with the placement. This may reflect the differences that can exist in the priorities of practitioners and employers in relation to the field educator role (Hartung Hagen, 1989). However, Ellis (1998) found evidence that the quality of organisational assistance for field educators in Aotearoa may be dependent on whether the line manager is a social worker, suggesting that the differences in role expectations may depend on professional background. Regardless of these variations, field education practice appears to be negatively affected by limited recognition, support and understanding from agencies employing field educators. Perhaps this lack of organisational commitment is related to a failure to appreciate the value of field education for responding to some of the long-term pressures on agencies, such as the need for recruitment and workforce development (Develin & Matthews, 2008).

In contrast to research that suggests that organisations can have a negative impact on the provision of field education, there is some evidence to suggest a commitment by agencies to provide quality placements. Globerman and Bogo (2003) report an unexpected finding that Social Workers were motivated to become field educators by the commitment to education expressed by their manager or employing organisation. Taylor et al. (2008) found that most participants in a qualitative study in rural settings reported that their employer was supportive of field education. Ellis (1998) also notes that field educators in Aotearoa report that their employers are supportive of students once a placement has been offered. Field educators in Aotearoa have also noted that support from colleagues can help them to achieve the aim of a placement (Hay et al., 2006). However, field educators have also noted an expectation that they would manage their normal caseload in addition to working with a student and the pressures within the agency that act as a disincentive for the practitioner offering a placement in the first place (Ellis, 1998; Taylor et al., 2008). These pressures are particularly significant for new field educators who have identified supervision and workload relief as the most important forms of assistance for their role (Waterhouse et al., 2011). Despite the commitment that agencies may have to providing quality placements, conflicting objectives and the reality of financial and workload pressures place significant stress on field educators that are likely to impact the approach adopted when working with students.

## 2.11 Professional Community

Field educators report a lack of systems for connecting with other practitioners and they can experience anxiety and isolation as a result (Rebholz, 2013). There is a significant risk that field education work can lead to burnout, even at the early stages of developing an identity as an educator. Connections with supportive colleagues may, therefore, be an important part of the professional socialisation process, particularly in the absence of formal training (McAllister, 2001).

There is evidence to suggest that field educators learn from each other if given the opportunity (Rogers, 1995). Experienced field educators report that they value the networks and informal supports that come from collegial learning groups, team assistance or mentoring from experienced practitioners (Dettlaff & Dietz, 2004; Waterhouse et al., 2011). Rogers (1995) argues convincingly for collegial learning, saying,

> what is required is that small groups of [field educators]-in-training, who trust each other, work together on an extended basis and provide each other with accurate, critical (not necessarily negative), thoughtful feedback on their actual performance and progress with a student over time. *(p. 230)*

Trevethan (2013) also suggests that schools need to provide structures that encourage dialogue and learning between teachers who are working as field educators.

Bogo (1981) describes a model for supporting field educators that utilises a peer group model, and a later study suggests that the less structured experiential style, focused on immediate professional needs, was valued by participants (Bogo & Power, 1995). The approach appears similar to the model proposed by Finch and Feigelman (2008) who developed a 12-week training programme that encourages field educators to bring examples of problematic work with students for the group to discuss and brainstorm solutions together. Another example of professional learning groups has been developed in Northern Ireland to complement a training and accreditation scheme (Douglas & Magee, 2012). Whilst this model involves challenges for facilitators to achieve collaborative learning, participants report that the process is supportive and valuable (Finch & Feigelman, 2008). Peer collaboration groups can increase field educators' sense of competence and confidence, although there can be challenges in keeping group discussions focused on practice (Barlow et al., 2004). The theory of communities of

practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) could be used to conceptualise the models proposed in these studies and help explain the process of new field educators learning from each other, particularly from experienced practitioners. In Aotearoa the concept of communities of practice has been explicitly utilised to help develop research-based field education placements and encourage learning between both field educators and students (Maidment et al., 2011). Trevethan (2013) also argues that field educators in teaching indicate a desire to become full participants in a community of practice that will inform their work. The findings from these various research projects suggest that peer learning may not simply be a method for delivering training but might also reveal that colleagues significantly influence the practice of field educators, regardless of whether this was an intentional learning strategy.

Interestingly, Unger (2003) came to quite different conclusions about peer support when she surveyed field educators working in rural locations in America to identify the supports they would find most helpful. Unger's findings suggest that participants valued receiving email support from academic staff but were less interested in using this medium for connecting with colleagues for peer support. Taylor, Mesinga, Casey and Caldwell (2008) also found that using teleconference facilities to encourage peer support was ineffective in rural locations in Australia. Whilst these findings appear to contradict the research in support of collegial support mechanisms (Finch & Feigelman, 2008; Rogers, 1995; Waterhouse et al., 2011) it should be noted that participants in Unger's (2003) study were asked for their prospective opinion about supports that they had not necessarily experienced and Taylor et al. (2008) only provided one teleconference that might model how the medium could be used. It could, therefore, be argued that field educators may not identify a community of practice as being a significant support unless they have personally experienced the value in concrete ways.

## 2.12 Summary of literature

This review of the literature highlights a number of themes that informed my own research and suggested factors that are likely to influence the practice of field educators. Life experiences long before deciding to become a field educator, including those as a student on placement, are the beginning influences on the process of transition from social work practitioner. These experiences provide some of the source of motivation to be a field educator, along with a passion for learning and the influence of factors in the organisational context. Formal field educator training and professional development

does have an impact on practice but this connection may not be as direct or linear as might be assumed. The influence of regulation and policy on practice is also evident in the form of competence standards and accreditation, which are linked to the education or preparation process. However, other factors beyond the education process also play a very significant role in shaping the practice of field educators. The attitude of the student and their relationship with the field educator can have a significant impact on the field education process. The procedures, level of communication and support from the academic institution also shape the way field educators work with students. In addition, the organisational context impacts on practice in the form of management support, workload, and the realities of financial pressures and tensions with the clinical focus of the agency. Finally, the risk of anxiety and isolation for field educators, and the potential benefit of collegial support and peer support from collegial learning groups and mentoring, has been shown. These factors illustrate the complexity and variety of influences on field education practice. Although research to date has considered these aspects of field educator practice, this has not been done in a holistic manner to explore the integration between the various dimensions and the impact of this broad range of influences. My research sought to address this gap by exploring field education as a whole system and developing a model to describe the complex influences on field educators and their practice.

# 3 METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Methodological Coherence

In this chapter, I explore the epistemological, theoretical and methodological influences on this research and then in Chapter 4 I discuss the research design that flows from these foundations. My goal in this discussion is to explain the connections between the epistemology, theoretical perspectives and methods of this inquiry so it is clear how my research has been conceptualised, while also being transparent about the influences that shaped the objectives, design and conclusions of my research.

There are many factors that might significantly influence how a research project is undertaken, some which the researcher may later wish had been avoided. Family circumstances, work pressures, supervision or health may all impact on the development of the research. In my own case, during the process of completing this research, I had to suspend study to respond to significant family crises, I had to negotiate additional work pressures due to the evolution of my professional role and also balance demands related to personal health and wellbeing. Innes (1998) identifies the impact of family issues on study, or the implications of study for family life, as some of the most significant sources of stress during postgraduate study, potentially necessitating changes in the research. However, although adaptations may need to be made to a research project to respond to these issues, it is the underpinning philosophical perspective adopted by the researcher that guides such decisions.

The researcher's philosophical standpoint and the resulting connections between ontology, epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods are critical

influences within any research, even where it is not explicitly identified. Michael Crotty (1998, p. 4) eloquently argues that there should be a logic to the structure and points of connection between the philosophical, theoretical and practical components contained within any research. He suggests that researchers often fail to make explicit the logic used in selecting particular perspectives or approaches and that research texts even confuse the distinctions between epistemology and theoretical perspective. Holloway and Todres (2003) also argue that the overlaps that exist within qualitative research in the areas of epistemology, theoretical perspective and design have led to some researchers adopting a generic approach. This can be contrasted with a slavish application of methods for their own sake, which is equally undesirable. However, Holloway and Todres suggest that flexibility must be balanced with consistency to produce research that has coherence. Articulating the connections between the building blocks of a research project is, therefore, an important starting point for describing any empirical endeavour.

## 3.2 Epistemological Orientation

The process of undertaking research involves answering philosophical questions about what can be considered acceptable knowledge in the relevant discipline (Bryman, 2012); in this case social work education. Answering these epistemological questions helps to identify a philosophical foundation that is congruent with the focus of the study. In his discussion of the connections between epistemological traditions and theoretical perspectives, Crotty (1998, pp. 8–9) suggests three broad philosophical camps in social science research; objectivism, constructionism and subjectivism. A range of theoretical perspectives can be located within each philosophical camp, each drawing on a different perspective about the relationship between subjects and objects, or described more simply, between human beings and the things they interact with in the world.

The objectivist takes the perspective that objects in the world have a pre-existing reality separate from the consciousness of human beings (Crotty, 1998). According to this paradigm, knowledge and truth about field education would be gained through careful observation of the processes and practises used by field educators. In contrast, the subjectivist questions the existence of an external reality and holds the perspective that objects only have the meaning that has been imposed on them by human subjects (Crotty, 1998). According to this epistemological perspective field education practice

would only ever have the attributes that are created through the thinking undertaken by field educators and so the focus of inquiry would be on exploring these assigned meanings. Constructionism, the third epistemological paradigm, adopts the perspective that there is an external social reality but subjects and objects are in a co-creating partnership and knowledge and truth are constructed through this interaction, mediated by language (Crotty, 1998). From a constructionist perspective, the practise of field education has particular attributes that are constructed by the interaction of field educators with students, other practitioners and significant processes and practises. A constructionist inquiry into field education would also involve an examination of meaning constructed through the language used by practitioners, which is the particular focus of symbolic interactionism.

Social work has been described as a socially constructed profession (Payne, 1997) and social constructionism has been an influential paradigm that some believe could be used to unify the profession (Hall, 2005). However, objectivism has also strongly influenced the profession (Lit & Shek, 2002), particularly in light of the "evidence-based practice" movement (Webb, 2001, p. 78). Others consider that subjectivism has also shaped the profession in the guise of post-structuralism and post-modernism (Thyer & Pignotti, 2015). Whilst all three epistemological standpoints identified by Crotty (1998) have been significant at various times in the history of social work, the focus on the interaction between subject and object in constructionism has significant resonance with social work, emphasising the interplay between human beings and objects in the world. This point of connection is reflected in the global definition of social work, which states that the profession's "legitimacy and mandate lie in its intervention at the points where people interact with their environment" (International Federation of Social Workers, 2015, para. 16).

In his consideration of the relevance of Bhaskar's critical realism for emancipatory social work, Houston (2001) highlights two particular criticisms of the influence of constructionism on the social work profession. Firstly, the focus on the impact of how language is constructed in human interactions results in an underdeveloped analysis of human agency, and yet the capacity for choice is necessary to achieve an empowerment focus in social work. Secondly, the relativism inherent in a constructionist perspective is inconsistent with the use of prescribed value positions that are necessary in fields of practice such as child protection. These arguments are certainly a useful critical analysis of postmodernist approaches to social work. However, this critique appears to reflect the

problem identified by Crotty (1998, p. 9) when he notes that authors often describe a subjectivist perspective when claiming to be discussing constructionism. Houston (2001) identifies a number of limitations with 'constructionism' that he links to concerns about the subjectivity of post-structuralism and postmodernism. It could, therefore, be argued that his critique is related more to a subjectivist epistemology than a constructionist one.

Regardless of the merits and limitations of constructionism, it does appear that this epistemology has been influential within the social work profession, both from an academic and practice perspective. Constructionist ideas were indeed influential on my own social work practice with adults with intellectual impairments and mental health issues. I began my career working with people with intellectual impairments and was strongly influenced by the concept of "Social Role Valorization" developed by Wolf Wolfensberger (2011, p. 438), which argues that people are devalued in society when they are not seen as having valuable roles, others then behave negatively towards them or use derogatory language, and the people themselves behave in ways expected of their role. When I began working with people in mental health services, I was also influenced by the ideas of Thomas Szasz (1961) who argued that the diagnostic criteria for mental illnesses had been developed by the psychiatric profession, and codified in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, as a form of social control to respond to the challenges present in society from people living together. Most of my practice experience has also been undertaken during a period dominated by neoliberal politics, with its language of the marketplace and the rationalisation of resources. These forces are evident in field education (Morley & Dunstan, 2013) as well as social service delivery and I have been influenced by the critique of this approach. Constructionist ideas about the role of social interaction in defining 'truth', the significance of language and the impact of objects on the way we think can all be seen in these examples of the theoretical influences on my practice. As a social worker, I understood client's problems as being constructed through their engagement with physical, linguistic, cultural and cognitive objects in their environment, and I sought to explore multiple perspectives when addressing those issues. In the same way, when I came to investigate some of the challenges within field education I understood these to be related to the prescribed purpose of the role, the tools and resources available to field educators, the language used to describe field education and the collective thinking of the community of practitioners.

A variety of epistemological positions can be used as appropriate foundations for social work research. However, constructionism might be described as an orthodox paradigm (Houston, 2001) that is congruent with how many social workers practice with clients. Constructionism is consistent with how I conceptualise my work as a practitioner and researcher, and I, therefore, identify it as the epistemological starting point for this particular inquiry.

## 3.3 Theoretical Perspectives

A range of theoretical perspectives could potentially be used within an inquiry informed by constructionism since a "coherent epistemological viewpoint" (Holloway & Todres, 2003, p. 346) constrains certain choices but still allows a degree of flexibility. Theoretical perspectives in social research need to be congruent with an epistemological stance on the one hand and with the nature of the topic of exploration on the other. For this particular research project, constructionism certainly disposed me to certain theoretical perspectives in preference to others, but features of social work and education also influenced the lenses I used to inform the inquiry process. The topic of interest in this study suggests a focus on practical solutions to the challenges facing field educators, on the one hand, and at the same time a concern for the influence of power on their practice. Field education is an activity at the interface between social work and education, both being disciplines that commonly focus on producing findings that have clear practice implications (Biesta & Burbules, 2003; McLaughlin, 2007). This orientation towards the practical implications of inquiry is a reflection of the pragmatic maxim first proposed by Peirce in his presentation of the philosophy of pragmatism (Bacon, 2014). Whilst pragmatic concerns may be a key feature of the topic of field education, issues of power are also evident. Social work field education is often not seen as a core part of the work of social service agencies, and at the same time, it is undervalued in the academy (Gursansky & Le Sueur, 2012). This situating of field education suggests that field educators operate on the periphery of both social service agencies and the academy, indicating a need for a theoretical perspective that addresses questions related to the relative exercise of power and control between these domains. A critical version of pragmatism responds to both of these features of social work field education as a topic of inquiry and at the same time is congruent with a constructionist epistemology. In the following discussion, I explore these points of connection and explain the particular version of pragmatism that I have adopted in this study.

## 3.4 Pragmatism

The term ‘pragmatic’ is often used in everyday speech to denote a focus on negotiating the equally unsatisfactory options involved in a dilemma and doing what is possible in response. The term ‘pragmatist’ is frequently employed to identify one who is disinterested in theory or abstract ideas (Talisse & Aikin, 2008). However, these terms were originally related to a perspective that responds to the dogmatism and scepticism inherent in modern western philosophy. Pragmatism seeks to find a middle ground between binary positions and to resolve long-standing philosophical debates through a process of re-framing. Pragmatism is therefore very much concerned with theory and with reconstructing questions posed by philosophical thought.

Pragmatism emerged as a school of thought in the latter part of the nineteenth-century, primarily through the writings of Charles Peirce, William James and John Dewey (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Although considered to be the first truly American philosophical movement, pragmatism attracted adherents from around the world in the early 1900’s, due in large part to promotion by William James at a time when he was considered to be an academic celebrity (Menand, 1997). However, later in the 20$^{th}$ century the movement became eclipsed by analytic philosophy and it was not until the second half of the century that certain philosophers began to critique analytic philosophy, and pragmatism once again provided a rich source of alternative explanations for common philosophical problems (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Egginton and Sandbothe (2004, p. 2) suggest that “in light of the current reinvestment in pragmatic thinking, the fabled divisions between analytic and continental thought are being rapidly replaced by a transcontinental desire to work on common problems in a common idiom”.

The American philosopher and psychologist, William James, first coined the phrase ‘pragmatism’ in a lecture in 1898 in which he identified his friend Charles Peirce as having developed the principle of pragmatism. The principle of pragmatism, he explained, is that “the ultimate test of what a truth means is indeed the conduct it dictates or inspires” (James, cited in Menand, 1997, p. xiii). Pragmatists understand truth as a tool for helping us to have a more useful relationship with our environment. There is, therefore, a strong connection between knowledge and action; taking action provides the building blocks through which we acquire knowledge. John Dewey’s philosophy built on the work of James and Pierce and he is considered the architect of

instrumentalist pragmatism (Margolis, 2009). Dewey believed that philosophers had artificially separated knowledge and action, and argued that in fact, they are both part of a single process of adaptive transaction between human beings and their environment (Dewey, 1929; Menand, 1997). My research seeks to apply the synthesis of knowledge and action by using inquiry as a process for exploring the challenges faced by field educators and as a catalyst for changes in practice.

Pragmatists believe that inquiry not only occurs in research but is also inherent in the everyday process of people testing their beliefs and theories about the world around them through a process of experience and experimentation (Garrison, 1994). Dewey argued that human beings are constantly impacted by challenges within the environment and learn to negotiate these challenges in more intelligent ways through developing experience that leads to more ordered ways to respond (Dewey, 2004). From a pragmatist perspective, field educators are constantly responding to the challenges they face when working with students on placement and are developing experience and theories about how to achieve desired outcomes. Theory is, therefore, a tool that field educators use to negotiate the world that they practice in, and pragmatism suggests that these theories are measured by their usefulness for solving problems or answering questions about how to interact with the environment in effective ways (Menand, 1997). Dewey (1929) described the process of developing experience to respond to challenges in the environment as experimental and argued that this process involves social and communicative interaction. Pragmatists view experience as emerging from a social external world rather than from an individual internal one. Although Dewey did not think that there are solutions to all problems, he did argue that social intelligence is only possible if we strive to find solutions (Kadlec, 2007).

### 3.4.1 Pragmatism and Epistemology

Pragmatism seeks to challenge long-held assumptions about the way people think by avoiding the dualisms found in the analytical branch of western philosophy (Menand, 1997). Reality is traditionally understood, within Cartesian dualism, to consist of a separation between the mental and the physical, leading to questions about how to bridge the gap between the mental world of theory and the physical world of practice (Garrison, 2013). The discourse about the challenge of bridging the gap between theory and practice during the field education process (for example see Clapton & Daly, 2007) is a reflection of this dualistic thinking. Dewey argued that the foundational

epistemological question of how the internal mind gains knowledge about the external world is only relevant if one assumes there is an immutable difference between mind and matter (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Dewey reconstructed theory and experience as distinct but connected phases of meaning-making, understood as the dynamic transaction that takes place between human beings and their environment as they seek to address the challenges of daily life (Dewey, 1929). My approach in the present inquiry is to view the research process as a tool for answering practical questions facing field educators about how to respond to the challenges involved in working with students on placement. From this perspective, the research is not disconnected from practice, both are actions related to the process of meaning-making.

Questions about the objectivity of knowledge are also re-framed within the context of this dynamic transaction between human beings and their environment. Depending on the stage of the study, research in the pragmatic tradition may be more or less involved in an interactive relationship with participants in the pursuit of answers to complex questions (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Within pragmatic epistemology, knowledge is understood as both subjective and objective at the same time (Biesta & Burbules, 2003) and proponents argue that answers to complex questions cannot be obtained purely through valid and reliable observation, or through subjective narrative, but rather require the use of both (Bryman, 2008). Dewey's reconstruction of philosophical dualisms also means that pragmatist research requires an engagement with action or experimentation (Garrison, 2013). Seeking to know something requires an interaction with the environment; this process changes the environment and in response accommodations to this change are required (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). In this way, both the individual seeking knowledge and the environmental context are changed by the transaction between them. Informed by pragmatism, my approach in the present research is one of openness to active engagement with field educators, rather than adopting a distant observer stance. The use of focus groups is intended to engage field educators in the process of identifying possible solutions to the problems identified in the individual interviews, rather than assuming that valid answers could be identified without interaction with the community of practitioners.

A number of different positions in relation to knowledge can be identified within pragmatism as a school of thought. At the anti-epistemology end of the spectrum, no particular standard of knowledge is seen as more reliable than another and all knowledge is seen as dependent on the social and historical context in which it is

obtained (Talisse & Aikin, 2008). These arguments seem to ultimately lead to the view that it is not worth considering epistemology. Rather than discounting the value of epistemology entirely, other pragmatists suggest that knowledge must always be open to revision on the basis of new information and that our reasons for believing a proposition are dependent on the values we hold (Talisse & Aikin, 2008). Each of these arguments seeks to answer key epistemological questions by re-framing the underlying assumptions about how we know things. Whilst this re-framing may help to resolve certain longstanding conundrums, such as the relationship between theory and practice, pragmatism has failed to answer all of the challenges presented by other philosophers. In many ways, this situation simply confirms the pragmatists' view that even pragmatic epistemology is fallible and that irrevocable answers are impossible due to the amount of debate and inquiry that would be required to achieve them. Researchers who adopt pragmatism are therefore left to grapple with the imperfection and incompleteness of this approach, and to make their own determination as to whether adopting the principles of this philosophical orientation are more useful for their research endeavour than adopting alternative positions.

Metcalf (2008) proposes five principles that are evident in pragmatic inquiry and these are incorporated into this research. Firstly, researchers consider themselves equal participants in a learning process that involves participating with a community who will identify concepts and problems for investigation and then test knowledge claims and determine when they are convincing and useful for practice. This principle of community participation is applied in the current research in that the initial topic of investigation was identified in informal conversations with field education practitioners, the research questions were explored through individual interviews, and the community was then involved in evaluating my early theories through a series of focus groups. Secondly, pragmatic researchers examine concepts and problems through a variety of perspectives and seek to give voice to all those stakeholders who are invested in the topic of inquiry. In this research, field educators are clearly the central stakeholders, but I have sought to include the voice of a range of practitioners from different types of organisations and from a range of levels of experience. Metcalf (2008) also points out that the focus of pragmatic inquiry is described in terms of what practical action might be taken in response to the concepts and problems that have been identified. For this reason, focus groups were conducted in the second phase of the research to explore with practitioners how the theoretical ideas identified in the individual interviews might be

responded to in practice. The fourth principle of pragmatic inquiry is that pragmatic research should involve taking some action, or at least imagining taking action, and observing what results are obtained. Whilst the scope of this research did not allow for an extensive testing of the strategies identified by practitioners, the focus groups involved a process of discussing the actions that would be most likely to be effective in responding to the identified issues. During the period in which I conducted this research, I was also involved in the development of national guidelines (ANZASW, 2016) and local training for field educators. In both of these projects, I was able to apply knowledge gained from the interviews conducted in the present research, particularly in relation to the role of personal experience as a student in shaping field educator practice. The final criterion identified by Metcalf (2008), is that pragmatic researchers reflect on the consequences of the action, using the concepts that have been previously identified to evaluate the effects on the problem. Unfortunately, this final step was beyond the scope of the time-frame for this research, since the effects of the identified strategies might take several years to observe. Although this indicates one of the limitations of this research, the recommendations for action identified in the present study act as issues that can be investigated through further research.

Although principles from pragmatism inform this research, it is not an epistemology that prescribes particular methods or approaches to research (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Its main contribution as a philosophical movement is to question the assumptions that are contained in traditional research methodology and to suggest possibilities for new courses of action. Adopting a pragmatist viewpoint is consistent with my interest in exploring questions that will provide useful knowledge for the practice of field education. Ultimately I am concerned with improving the activity we call field education and this research project is a tool in that process and is therefore focused on action. At the same time, I acknowledge that the findings of this research are shaped by the fact that the research is undertaken at a time and in a place where field education is significant both for the local social work community and for me as a field education co-ordinator. In adopting a pragmatic approach to this research, I am seeking to use methods that will identify rich and deep explanations to inform field education practice, whilst at the same time acknowledging that these findings are fallible and may be revised through further enquiry. The methodology I have used seeks to respond to the concerns and conceptions presented by field educators and to involve them in a process of examining the practical usefulness of the conclusions I have drawn following

analysis of the data. Whilst the introduction of specific field education interventions is beyond the scope of this study, I have sought to work with field educators to identify the implications for action that could be tested through a further process of inquiry.

## 3.5 Critical Pragmatism

The social work profession has a strong connection with pragmatism that can be traced back to Jane Addams, the social reformer and early pioneer of social work in late nineteenth-century America. Addams founded Hull House as a collective of privileged and educated members of society who sought to apply knowledge to the practical problems facing the economically disadvantaged and to make the benefits of education more universally available (Addams, 1997). Addams has often been overlooked as an intellectual in her own right due to her focus on practical issues, and yet she had strong links to the Chicago School of Sociology and made significant contributions to the development of sociological thinking (Bilton, 2006). Addams had a profound influence on, and was in turn influenced by, two key figures in the development of American pragmatism, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead (Deegan, 1988; Guerra, 2013; Mahowald, 1997). Pragmatism provided Addams with the philosophical framework for a consideration of how democratic ideals and scientific methods could be applied to identify practical solutions to the problems faced by the culturally disenfranchised members of Chicago society. However, Addams has been described as a "critical pragmatist" (Deegan, 1988, p. 248) because she extended the ideas of pragmatism to include radical ideas about social and economic equality.

The emphasis on structural explanations for social problems, espoused by Addams, was influential in social work during the early part of the twentieth century but increasingly became dominated by a focus on individual psychological deficits until a renewed emphasis on critical approaches in the 1970s (Mendes, 2009). Values related to social justice and human rights are now recognised as central to the very definition of social work (International Federation of Social Workers, 2015), despite continued tension between casework and critical approaches to practice (Payne, 2006) and questions about which theoretical framework best serves critical social work (Fook, 2012). Regardless of these challenges for the critical social work project, the needs of the marginalised and oppressed within society remain a central concern for the profession and therefore critical theory is one of the key theoretical perspectives that inform social work education and practice (Langer & Lietz, 2014). This orientation was a feature of my

own social work education and one that I sought to include in my practice with clients despite working in agencies particularly influenced by neo-liberal politics and managerialism. My decision to incorporate a critical perspective into my academic research, and to seek explanations for problems that look beyond the intrapsychic to the environmental and political context, is, therefore, a reflection of my practice interests.

Cox and Hardwick (2002) have also suggested that social work educators should use critical theory as a basis for examining whether their teaching or research is simply supporting common but perhaps incorrect assumptions about what constitutes good practice. The importance of identifying assumptions seemed to be particularly important in this research so that the inquiry was sensitised to the presence of simplistic explanations of how to improve quality in field education, particularly those connected to ideas of deficits in field educators or in their training. A critical perspective in this research was also important due to the potential areas of tension or conflict. Tension was anticipated in field education because agencies are potentially interested in student placements as a source of resources (Bogo & Globerman, 1999), conflicting with the aims of educators or students who may be more interested in quality learning opportunities. Field educators operate at the interface of these competing discourses and are also likely to experience the reality of their work being undervalued both by the practice agency and the academic institution (Gursansky & Le Sueur, 2012). Field education also takes place within the context of a profession that is itself under political pressure and public scrutiny from the news media (Cooper, 2005). These features of the activity that is the focus of this current research indicate the importance of incorporating a critical perspective into the methodology, necessitating the identification of a theoretical model of social critique consistent with pragmatism.

Many critical theorists argue that foundational fixed value positions are required to be able to critically analyse the power involved in maintaining oppression and inequality in social contexts. In contrast, Dewey had an anti-foundational view of existence, arguing that truth is relative to its situation, and this has led many to view pragmatism as being inherently uncritical (Kadlec, 2006). In his discussion of the relationship between pragmatism and critical theory, Richard Warner (1993) concludes that there cannot be a close connection between these two approaches because pragmatism does not allow any particular concept of justice to have prominence over any other. He suggests that critical theorists have misapplied pragmatism and that Dewey's theory does not allow any basis for value-based decision making. Indeed, it appears that the early pragmatists, apart

from Jane Addams, failed to provide any critique for the cultural challenges of the early twentieth century, including world war, slavery, racism, oppression of women and discrimination of immigrant children in education (Denzin, 1996). Despite these criticisms levelled at Dewey, a number of other scholars have sought to integrate pragmatism and critical theory. Ulrich (2007) suggests that pragmatism and discourse ethics should be connected and defines his version of critical pragmatism as a combination of "classical pragmatist conceptions of inquiry, meaning and truth with the critical turn of our notions of rational discourse and professional competence" (p. 1112). Discourse ethics is a model for determining ethical truth developed by Habermas, who has also attempted to combine the insights of pragmatism with critical theory (Ray, 2004). An alternative approach to integrating pragmatism and critical theory, and to addressing the problem of the apparent antithesis between anti-foundationalism and critical thinking, is Alison Kadlec's (2006, 2007) argument that pragmatism itself contains the capacity for social criticism.

Jürgen Habermas is identified as one of the most significant critical theorists, and he has developed his ideas by expanding beyond critical theory to draw on a wide range of other philosophical ideas, some of which would have been untenable to his predecessors (Ray, 2004). Marxism, as an early form of critical theory, was developed in a historical period that was pregnant with the possibility of social revolution, but this change seemed less likely in a post-communist, globalised age. Habermas has responded to this challenge by drawing on ideas of pragmatism, particularly from Pierce and Mead, to reconstitute critical theory by integrating it with pragmatism and symbolic interactionism (Ray, 2004). Despite his focus on Pierce and Mead, Habermas has also identified the more recent influence of Dewey on his thinking (Habermas, et al., 2002). He mentions that Dewey, in particular, focuses on action in relation to knowledge generation because of his interest in praxis and the way in which human beings cope with the challenges in the world around them. Despite several authors challenging whether Habermas is, in fact, a pragmatist (Aboulafia, 2002), his theory of communicative action is certainly recognised as drawing on principles from pragmatic philosophy. Whilst I do not intend to use the philosophy of Habermas as the basis for this study of social work field education, I want to draw attention to the fact that his work illustrates the congruity between pragmatism and critical theory despite the criticism that Dewey is uncritical.

The work of Alison Kadlec (2006, 2007, 2008) has connected pragmatism with critical theory from a different starting point than Habermas. She argues for a reading of Dewey that recognises the critical features of his thinking and the idea that pragmatism should be recognised as a critical theory in its own right. Wolfe (2012) also identifies that Dewey's form of pragmatism implicitly contains a conception of power despite the common belief to the contrary. Critical pragmatism is the term that is used for a critical form of pragmatism, which echoes back to the language used to describe the earlier approach epitomised in Jane Addams. "Critical pragmatism proceeds from the claim that the point of inquiry is . . . to improve our individual and shared capacity to tap into the critical potential of lived experience in a world that is unalterably characterised by flux and change" (Kadlec, 2007, p. 12).

Kadlec (2007) takes as the starting point for her argument four criteria for determining whether any theory can be categorised as falling into the critical theory camp. First, such a theory would identify aspects of society requiring development. Second, critical theorists believe in the power of critical reflection to inform intelligent action but, third, also recognise that this reflection is in jeopardy from power dynamics impacting individuals and communities. Last, critical theorists believe that collaborative interdisciplinary inquiry and research can help to ameliorate the risk of critical reflection being compromised. Kadlec (2006, 2007) argues that Dewey's more radical version of pragmatism meets these definitional standards and can, therefore, be considered a critical theory despite his anti-foundational stance.

Kadlec (2007) argues that fixed foundational values, such as class, gender, or race, can actually impede critical reflection because they limit the consideration of all possibilities for more informed action. From this critical pragmatist perspective, research into the practice of field educators should not begin by defining from the outset what specific forms of power and domination will be analysed, but rather the process of inquiry itself should be used to illuminate the presence of marginalisation from the perspective of the problems identified by the community itself. Dewey believed that the world is in a constant process of change influenced by our experience and that principles of democracy provide the basis for deliberation and collective critical reflection (Kadlec, 2006). The use of dialogue and democratic discussion is, therefore, the process by which change can be realised. From a critical pragmatist perspective, everyday existence and dialogue provide a resource for developing both individual and collective intelligence about how to overcome the negative implications of

marginalisation and conflict (Kadlec, 2007). Rather than looking to foundational ideas as the basis for critical reflection on the practice of field educators, I selected a dynamic process of inquiry as the method of cultivating critical reflection. In particular, I used focus groups to facilitate discussion and promote collective critical reflection.

The critical features of Dewey's version of pragmatism are connected to a particular explanation of why domination and subjugation are present within communities. Midtgarden (2012) explores this explanatory model by analysing a series of lectures that Dewey gave in China in 1919 and 1920 in which he articulates a three-phase understanding of the process of reforming power relations. In the first phase, the dominant group is able to maintain a position that goes unchallenged and history is used to maintain the status quo. In the second phase, moral challenge is brought to the power relationship but is minimised by the dominant group as simply the reflection of individual opinion. This phase is initiated by contextual social factors that result in the recognition by the subordinate group of a problem with their position. In the final phase, the ensuing open expression of conflict between groups is resolved through acceptance of the subordinate group's demands in the form of social change (Midtgarden, 2012). This view of social conflict goes beyond the socio-economic analysis of Marx, or gender analysis of feminists, whilst maintaining a social and group perspective on the process of resolution. Dewey argues that power imbalance is prevalent because the majority have not recognised how they may resist domination, and suggests that power imbalance should be challenged when it prevents individuals and communities from development and free expression of creativity (Midtgarden, 2012). Midtgarden suggests that the art of discussion is the mechanism that can be used for empowering people to resist domination but recognises that this art must be taught before it can be fully utilised.

The approach taken in this research was to anticipate examples of marginalisation and domination in the activity of field education and to be alert to the effects of powerful groups maintaining the status quo. Rather than analysing these forces from the perspective of pre-existing foundational ideas such as gender, sexuality, race or culture, I sought to use the experience of field educators as the basis for identifying and analysing specific examples of power. The existence of domination and control was understood as the failure to employ democratic conversation and the process of inquiry was viewed as offering the potential to act as a catalyst for a more open dialogue

between different stakeholders. The process of inquiry was theorised as a mechanism that could ultimately bring about change and more informed action.

## 3.6 Theory of Learning

This research project is concerned with the process of learning to be a social work field educator and so I now explain the theoretical perspective on learning that informs this inquiry. Returning to the idea of the importance of compatibility between the various philosophical and theoretical elements of the research, it is important to articulate how the theoretical perspective on learning is consistent with both constructionism and critical pragmatism. Initially, I explored situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as a potential theoretical framework because it appeared to provide a useful model that could explain how social workers learnt to be field educators through participation. However, the prescriptive nature of communities of practice (Hughes, 2007), and the implication that this is how social workers should learn to be field educators, appeared to limit the utility of situated learning. I then investigated Cultural-historical activity theory, which is a related theory of learning, although with a wider analytical perspective focused on collective rather than individual action (Arnseth, 2008). Activity theory has not been widely used by social work researchers, although Fire and Casstevens (2013) have used it to redesign a graduate course in America, Mørck (2011) to analyse empowerment practice in Denmark, and Foot (2014) has convincingly argued that activity theory offers a powerful framework for investigating social work practice. I selected activity theory as an analytical lens because it appeared to offer a comprehensive model for explaining collective work and development without the implied notions of how learning should happen contained in situated learning theory.

Activity theory shares many of the same philosophical roots as situated learning, originating as it does in the work of Karl Marx and Lev Vygotsky (Holzman, 2006). Although Marx and Vygotsky developed their ideas in Russia, and their work did not directly intersect with Peirce, James or Dewey, “many of the ideas of pragmatism have common features with activity theory” (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999, p. 5). Garrison (2001) also noted the similarities between pragmatism and activity theory, although his objective was to highlight the points of difference and suggest that Dewey’s version of pragmatism offers an alternative paradigm to activity theory. Miettinen (2001) suggests that Garrison’s analysis is based on a limited understanding of activity theory and elsewhere (Miettinen, 2006) argues that “both of the theories suggest that the interaction

between man (sic) and his environment, mediated by tools and language, constitutes the foundation of knowledge" (p. 391). Miettinen goes on to identify four points of connection between Dewey's version of pragmatism and activity theory. Firstly, he argues that both traditions use the concept of practice, or activity, to overcome the traditional dichotomy between the subject and object, or the physical and mental. Human beings are engaged in practical activity and this results in a process of dialectical change, both in the individual and in the environment. Secondly, proponents of both pragmatism and activity theory regard language and meaning-making as tools for collective activity, assisting the process of human beings working together and understanding each other's attitude to the activity. The third area of commonality is the idea that although the environment is changed by an individual's activity, it also resists change and therefore actively engages in shaping activity. The final point of connection is the focus on experimentation and intervention as necessary components of research. Until an idea is applied in practice its utility remains unclear and the value of the reflective process unconfirmed. Miettinen (2006) clearly identifies strong points of connection between pragmatism and activity theory that suggests complementarity despite the independent and geographically distant development of the two theories. Using activity theory as a heuristic tool, in particular to inform the development of the first interview schedule in the initial phase of the research, is therefore consistent with pragmatism as a philosophical orientation for the research as a whole.

## 3.7 Cultural Historical Activity Theory

Activity theory shares with pragmatism the concern with the dialectical relationship between human beings and the environment. During the 19$^{th}$ century, a shift in thinking took place in response to the industrial revolution, leading to a greater recognition of the complex interconnection between organisms and their environment and their capacity for change (Engeström, 1987). Recognition of this interdependence can be seen in Charles Darwin's argument that all living organisms are in a process of dynamic adaptation to their environment, which leads to a process of ultimately radical change that takes place over time (Engeström, 1987). Karl Marx theorised that human beings are not simply passive beings upon which nature has a moulding effect, but rather, they actively engage in attempting to master the environment through their activity (Giest, 2008). In this process, tools are developed to help individuals cope with the world around them but these tools, in turn, shape those who use them. This can be

dramatically seen in the way in which technology has radically changed how people think, speak and interact with others, both in their immediate environment and around the globe. The process of tools shaping those who use them can also be seen in social work field education. Professional supervision is a tool used by field educators when working with students but it is possible that in the process of adopting the tool of supervision, field educators begin to conceptualise an educational process in non-educational ways. As has already been noted, this perspective is also evident in pragmatism which eschews the dichotomy between the internal world of the individual and the external world of their environment.

Lev Vygotsky was interested in the problem of how to explain psychological phenomena without starting from the traditional dichotomy of mind and matter that results in either a focus on biological and behavioural explanations on the one hand or environmental factors on the other. Vygotsky adopted the ideas first developed by Marx about the dialectical relationship between human beings and the environment through the process of activity (Daniels, 2001). He argued that all activity involves more than the simple stimulus and response process suggested by behaviourism. He suggested that a dialectical effect is created by an intermediary, in the form of a mediating artefact. This mediating artefact can be thought of as a tool and might include psychological processes such as language. The introduction of a tool, Vygotsky argued, not only affects the object of the activity, or the response, but also the subject, or site of the stimulus (Daniels, 2001). This dialectical process can be seen in the way assessment documents provided by academic institutions influence field educators when assessing students during the practicum. The assessment document, which can be classed as a mediating artefact or tool, determines which aspects of the student's competence will be considered in the assessment and therefore shapes the final assessment decision, thereby impacting on the object of the activity of student assessment. However, the assessment document also influences how the field educator thinks about the student's competence and the pertinent things to observe, thereby impacting on the subject of the activity system. The dialectical relationship that exists between assessment documents (mediating artefact) and both the field educator (subject) and student assessment (object) can be represented as shown in Figure 3-1.

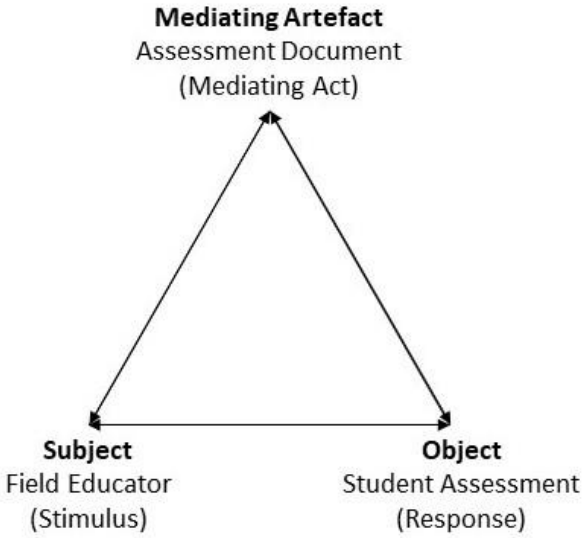


***Figure 3-1: Vygotsky's model of the mediated act applied to student assessment in field education.***
Adapted from: Engeström, Y. (2001). Expansive Learning at Work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work*, *14*(1), 134.

The next stage in the development of activity theory is found in the work of Aleksei N. Leont'ev (Engeström, 1987) who worked with Vygotsky from 1924 to 1930. Leont'ev made a distinction between three levels of analysis through which human activity can be viewed. The highest level is the level of collective activity and the motives that underpin this activity, the intermediate level involves the actions of individuals and the goals to which they are directed, and the lowest level of analysis concerns the operations used to achieve higher goals. Leont'ev was seeking to differentiate the actions of individuals from collective activity whilst also acknowledging their interconnection. The classical illustration provided by Leont'ev (1978 as cited in Daniels, 2001) uses an example of a tribal hunt and highlights the different roles that tribesmen might take, either scaring game towards other hunters or actually killing the game, whilst all are engaged in the activity of hunting that is directed at obtaining food or clothing. Elsewhere (Chilvers, 2011, p. 81), I have provided the following example from a social work context:

> *One might think about the different roles within a child protection assessment team. Within the team are social workers who have frequent contact with children who need protection from abuse, and administrators who have no direct contact with vulnerable children. The tasks of administrators may be quite similar in a whole range of diverse*

> *organisational settings, and their objective is focused on maintaining accurate and easily retrievable information. Considered in isolation, administrators do not appear to be engaged in tasks that are focussed on the overall goal of protecting children. However, when embedded in the context of a child protection assessment team, it is easy to see how the actions of an administrator become critically important to protecting children from abuse, and social workers would not achieve this goal as effectively without the involvement of administrators. Individual action and group activity are therefore quite distinct although interconnected.*

As can be seen in these diverse examples, Leont'ev understood activity to be possible because of cooperation between individuals as a collective, therefore requiring rules for participants to follow and a distribution of tasks and power. Yrjö Engeström (1987) developed Leont'ev's ideas, expanding on the original representation of mediated activity, to include three additional nodes, or points of intersection in the diagram, namely: community, rules and division of labour. In Engeström's (2001) expanded model of activity the subject, object and tools are defined in terms that are consistent with original descriptions from Vygotsky or Leont'ev. The *subject* is the person or group whose perspective is being adopted in the analysis and whose actions are trying to be understood; the *object* is the "complex, multifaceted, organizing principle of an activity" (Foot, 2002 p. 139) that focuses the actions within the activity system and transforms goals into outcomes; and the *tools* are those artefacts that mediate between the subject and the object, or direct activities towards an outcome, and may include physical tools, cultural tools including language, or symbolic tools. Engeström expands this model to include the *community* of individuals or groups who have a stake in the object of the activity and posits that all activity systems have a set of *rules*, either explicitly stated or implied, and created by the beliefs or values of the participants. Finally, the six-node model suggests that all collective activity involves decisions about the *division of labour* to determine who will undertake which actions, a process that is far from benign because authority and power are exercised in the process of assigning roles.

To help translate Engeström's model and apply it to the current study, consider the perspective of a field educator in the social work field education activity system. The field educator is the *subject* and she is motivated by students and their need to learn how to become competent practitioners. The intended *object* of the activity of field education

might include competent and inspired neophyte social workers who are able to integrate theory and practice in creative ways. However, unintended outcomes are also possible, for instance creating demoralised and frustrated technocrats. The *tools* that the field educator uses might include external items such as supervision forms, learning and teaching exercises or assessment documents, as well as internal tools such as theories of supervision or pedagogy. The *community* that has an interest in the students' development would include academic staff, managers in the agency or other students. The academic institution applies certain *rules* to the activity of field education, but other rules will be imposed by the placement agency, professional association or registration body. Finally, the *division of labour* defines the roles played by the field educator, academic staff, agency managers, other staff and the student, and it dictates the power of each to make decisions that will impact on the outcome of the activity.

The third phase of development in activity theory, led by the work of Yrjö Engeström, builds on the foundations provided by Vygotsky, Leont'ev and others. Engeström (2001) takes the unit of analysis beyond single activity systems into the realm of activity networks. He argues that all activity systems operate in a dialectical relationship with other activity systems and cannot be considered in isolation. For example, the activity of field education is impacted by the activity of clinical social work practice and the activity of classroom teaching, and rules may be imposed on field education by both of these activity systems. The simple model of an activity system as described above is therefore extended to include at least one other activity system that is interacting or impinging on the first. The dialectic relationship between these two systems results in secondary objects and outcomes constructed by the activity system.

Engeström (2001) highlights the importance of "multi-voicedness" (p. 136) in analysing activity systems. The presence of a community and the interrelationship between several activity systems means that a range of perspectives must be considered. Field education is undertaken at the intersection of several activity systems: classroom-based social work education, social work practice in social service agencies, assessment of practitioner competence by the professional association, and social work registration. Analysing the activity of field education needs to consider the interrelationship of these various systems. The rules and division of labour may also have a range of representations or a history that warrants the consideration of these from several perspectives. Indeed, the historical features of the activity system are a second important factor in any analysis. The importance of the history of social work field education is

evident in discussions about ‘student units’, which were a popular model for field education in Aotearoa in the 1980’s involving a close collaboration between academic institutions and social service agencies, that some believe should be reintroduced to improve current experiences for students (Hay & Teppett, 2011). Activity systems change and alter over relatively long periods of time and these developments need to be taken into consideration if the present functioning of the activity system is to be understood.

An important feature of Engeström’s (1987) conception of activity theory is the idea of tensions building up over time within activity systems (Barab, Barnett, & Squire, 2002). These tensions lead to contradictions at a number of levels within the activity system Engeström (2001). Firstly, contradictions may exist within individual nodes often related to the value of something and what must be given up to realise it. For example, field educators are often able to identify the learning and teaching methods that are most helpful in promoting student learning, however, they also involve a time cost for the field educator both to comprehensively learn the method and to apply it in practice. This contradiction was identified by Maidment (2000b), who found that field educators identify those methods that students also recognise as most helpful for learning, but these methods are in fact underutilised in practice. Secondly, contradictions exist between nodes. For example, rules within a social work agency about workload management and the efficiency of the team may contradict the importance of the field educator spending time with the student, helping him/her to make sense of the work. Workload management may therefore negatively impact on field educators and therefore student learning (Hay et al., 2006; Waterhouse et al., 2011). Contradictions also exist between higher and lower order activity systems. For example, rules may be imposed by the SWRB about who can be a field educator, the duration of the practicum, or the focus of the learning (SWRB, 2016a) that may be in conflict with the learning needs of an individual student. Contradictions may also exist between neighbouring activity systems. For example, field education takes place in the context of ‘real-world’ social work practice. The needs of clients, the pace or focus of the intervention may be in conflict with the needs of the student for learning opportunities. Field educators may be faced with taking actions that are in the best interests of the client but may not be in the best interests of the student.

Contradictions in activity systems are the sites of potential innovation or development (Foot, 2014). Engeström (2001) suggests that tensions build up over time and may lead

participants in the activity system to take action that is outside the normal script. These deviations reveal the presence of a contradiction but they may also be revealed through disrupted processes or interactions taking an unexpected course (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2008). Highlighting these tensions can lead to creative solutions, resulting in what Engeström (2001) calls expansive learning, or the transformation of an activity system. Engeström argues that contradictions or tensions can be manipulated in such a way as to promote transformation in the motivation for undertaking the activity. "An expansive transformation is accomplished when the object and motive of the activity are re-conceptualised to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of the activity" (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). The view that contradictions can be manipulated to catalyse change highlights the belief in an interventionist approach to research, which was discussed earlier as a point of connection between activity theory and pragmatism.

Lektorskii (2004) has challenged the concept of expansive learning from a postmodern perspective because of the inherent idea of developing towards some ideal state or form of activity. However, Engeström does not appear to argue for utopian forms of activity but rather that both positive and negative change is possible in response to being confronted with the tensions or contradictions in the form of activity. Despite this openness to both positive and negative change, Engeström's argument does seem to suggest that activity systems will always respond to evidence of contradictions and seek some resolution. Young (2001) argues that the implied belief that members of an activity system will always seek solutions to evidence of contradictions is a weakness in activity theory because it fails to fully acknowledge the power dynamics that work against expansive learning. Recognition of power dynamics is part of the activity theory analysis, particularly in the form of the division or labour and in the interplay between activity systems; however, the political nature of resistance to change is perhaps under-theorised (Avis, 2009). Although contradictions may be present and the contradictions highlighted to the actors involved, there may still be an absence of motivation for change (Young, 2001).

The possibility of a lack of motivation for change is certainly a concern in relation to social work field education since placement learning and teaching is a marginalised activity both within academic institutions and social work agencies (Gursansky & Le Sueur, 2012). This concern needs careful consideration since it may impact on the influence that this research is able to have in bringing about change. The significant

power dynamics within field education and the weakness of activity theory to analyse these dimensions highlights the importance of adopting critical pragmatism as a theoretical framework. The critical version of pragmatism provides a counter to the weaknesses inherent in using activity theory as a heuristic tool. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of activity theory and to respond by drawing on theoretical frameworks that are both congruent and provide a strengthening counterbalance.

## 3.8 Professional Socialisation

In addition to an interest in learning within activity systems, this research is also concerned with the learning that takes place during the professional socialisation process for social work field educators. In this section, I explain the theoretical perspective on professional socialisation that informs this inquiry and explore the points of connection with the other theoretical perspectives used in this research.

Professional socialisation can be understood as the processes that shapes neophyte professionals as they develop the status and identity of a particular professional group. Seminal research undertaken with medical students in the late 1950's established two paradigms in relation to these professional socialisation processes (Atkinson, 1983). On the one hand, structural functionalism defines professional socialisation as a learning process, focused on the acquisition of the values, knowledge, skills and behaviours required to participate as a member of a profession. On the other hand, symbolic interactionism, which originates in pragmatism, defines professional socialisation as a repeated process of making adjustments in response to the challenges, conflict and demands of work and education contexts (Barretti, 2004b). These two contrasting theoretical perspectives have subsequently influenced much of the research related to the field of professional socialisation. Atkinson and Delamont (1985) argue that the field of professional socialisation became stagnant due to the failure of researchers to develop beyond the original theoretical models and the tendency to focus on the training institution as a completely bounded system.

In broad terms, structural functionalism starts from the assumption that the process of professional socialisation is a relatively smooth conflict-free process (Atkinson, 1983). Structural-functionalists theorise that students are empty vessels waiting to be filled with a professional identity that will be provided by teachers who readily want to support them on a relatively stable process of internalising professional behaviours

(Barretti, 2004b). In this paradigm, students and their socialising agents, such as academic staff, share common perspectives and values, and the contact with academics shapes the identity and self-concept of students. Ultimately, students are understood to be on a journey towards unconsciously adopting a single unified professional identity through exposure to educators who model the behaviours required of the professional community (Miller, 2010).

In contrast to structural-functionalists, symbolic interactionists theorise a process where students are active agents in a more contested process involving conflict and resistance (Atkinson, 1983). Symbolic interactionists have argued against a smooth, linear, sequential process, pointing out the role of conflicts between home and work, and the misinterpretation of messages from academic staff (Miller, 2010). Conflict and tension is therefore emphasised, along with an acknowledgement that students learn a significant amount from their peers and from their employers (Barretti, 2004a). Learning from educators is also contested because of the absence of a single professional perspective and the choices that students make about what knowledge, skills or values to adopt and what to discard. As students negotiate this ongoing process of making choices about what influences to incorporate into their professional identity, they may ultimately adopt multiple professional identities that serve them in different contexts (Barretti, 2004b).

Whilst a significant amount of research has been undertaken about professional socialisation in the medical profession and amongst nurses and teachers, relatively little research has focused on the socialisation of new graduates into the social work profession (Ryan, Fook, & Hawkins, 1995). Early studies focused on the development of the professional attitudes and self-awareness required of social workers, and educators were seen as facilitators of a personal development process (Barretti, 2004b). A further example of a structural-functionalist perspective is the use of a five-stage model of skill acquisition (Dreyfus, 2004) as a framework for researching the socialisation of social work students (Ryan et al., 1995) and experienced practitioners (Fook, Ryan, & Hawkins, 1997). The professional socialisation literature related to social work suggests that there has been a predominance of research adopting a structural-functionalist perspective although there are examples of studies informed by symbolic interactionism (Miller, 2010).

A symbolic interactionist perspective is congruent with research informed by constructionism, suggesting this to be a good fit for this research. Constructionism emphasises the ways that the community of field educators defines their role and the agency they hold to decide how to engage with training or other processes preparing them for working with students. Critical pragmatism also highlights the conflict and power dimensions in a similar way to a symbolic interactionist perspective. However, Atkinson (1983) has highlighted that symbolic interactionism can also result in the untenable conclusion that no learning happens through formal processes. Atkinson suggests that symbolic interactionism often provides too narrow a frame of analysis, failing to explore the socialising influences outside of the learning institution. I have therefore chosen to adopt the pragmatic approach of viewing both structural functionalism and symbolic interactionism as fallible theories and to explore ways to incorporate insights from both perspectives that will provide tools to enable this inquiry to be more practically useful.

Having conducted a systematic review of the literature on professional socialisation, Miller (2010) has proposed an integrated model that specifically applies to the social work profession. This model is a nonlinear or sequential phased based model that incorporates stages both prior to formal education, and following graduation. When applied to social workers who become field educators, Miller's model suggests that the socialisation process begins prior to any decision to work with students, possibly even prior to becoming a social worker. Included in this *pre-socialisation phase* are life experiences such as early childhood events, which are later combined with factors that influence the individual’s decision to be a social worker and later to specialise as a field educator. These factors are understood to begin to shape professional identity even before beginning any formal education pathway to be a social worker. Once the individual embarks on the *formal socialisation* pathway of a social work education programme, they become influenced by the content of the subjects presented by academic staff. The structure of the programme also has a significant influence because it provides a specific focus and is delivered by educators with a particular emphasis, whether in the classroom or during field education. The field education experiences are likely to have a significant influence on later decisions to be a field educator and on the approach adopted when working with students. Following graduation, the professional socialisation process continues in practice *post formal socialisation* through the paid and professional roles that the social worker assumes and the contexts in which these

roles are enacted. This is where the model particularly incorporates the socialisation associated with a decision to specialise as a field educator. A key aspect of Miller's (2010) model is that throughout the three phases of the process the social worker makes independent choices about which messages to listen to and which areas of knowledge, skills, values or behaviours they will incorporate into their professional identity.

A number of points of connection can be identified between the literature on professional socialisation in social work and key features of activity theory. Firstly, both fields of thought emphasise the role of conflict. Symbolic interactionist models emphasise that professional socialisation is a dynamic process of response to tension or conflict that the individual experiences as a result of work or education demands. Conflict may exist in many areas, including between the different roles that the individual adopts in both work and home life, or between the agenda of educators and the decisions the individual makes about what they will incorporate into their professional identity. The identification of conflict is also a key feature of activity theory, in particular in the analysis process. The process of analysing a work activity using Engeström's triangular model involves the identification of conflict between the various nodes of an activity system or between related activity systems. Tension and conflict is seen as a source of learning and transformation in the activity system and may lead to new expressions of the activity. The examination of tensions or conflict is, therefore, an important step in understanding the factors that influence how field educators learn to work with students on practicum.

A second point of connection between professional socialisation and activity theory is the role played by other actors and the context in which the professional operates. The literature on social work professional socialisation identifies that peers, managers and work contexts influence the development of professional identity, perhaps even more profoundly than the formal education process (Barretti, 2004a). Although any formal programme of study will have learning objectives and an intended graduate profile, there is also unofficial learning that takes place that may have a significant impact on the student's final professional identity. Holosko, Skinner, MacCaughelty and Stahl (2010) highlight the interplay between the formal, informal and implicit curriculum in social work education and the significance of modelling values both in the classroom and field. Peer group processes have also been demonstrated to be valuable in supporting the development of professional identity (Barretti, 2004b). These professional socialisation concepts have parallels in third generation activity theory: the

role that a community of practice plays in shaping the way in which a work activity is undertaken, the impact of the roles that are played by individuals through the division of labour, and the influence of the written and unwritten rules in a work setting (Engeström, 1987). The value placed on different aspects of field education within the work setting and the influence of colleagues, both peers and managers, are therefore likely to be significant factors in shaping how field educators approach their work and develop their practice.

A final point of connection between professional socialisation and activity theory is the importance of both past and future history. Professional socialisation for social workers appears to begin prior to any formal education process and indeed can be influenced by factors from early life experiences (Miller, 2010). The development of professional identity also continues long after any formal learning, through interactions with managers, colleagues and the demands of a field of practice (Fook et al., 1997). Activity theory also recognises the importance of history and explores the influence on present work practises of the previous forms that an activity may have taken. Cultural historical approaches to activity also highlight the transformational nature of work and the potential for development and change within activity systems. History is, therefore, an important dimension to consider when exploring the factors that influence how field education is conducted, either in terms of the personal life experiences of field educators or the ways in which field education has been conducted over time, or the challenges being faced going into the future.

## 3.9 Approach to Theory

One of the debates within the qualitative research community is the degree to which theoretical frameworks should be used at the beginning of a research process; therefore, it is important to explain the stance taken within this research. Analytic induction is an important principle in qualitative research, which appears to contrast with the idea of starting an inquiry by focusing on specific theoretical concepts (Thomas, 2006). One concern about starting with theoretical ideas is that during data analysis the researcher has a tendency to find whatever they were looking for in the first place (Morse & Mitcham, 2002). A second problem is that the researcher may identify more examples of a particular concept, or data related to the concept, than actually exist. However, Morse and Mitcham (2002) argue that it is unrealistic to think that research can begin without any influence of the researcher's prior experience or theoretical ideas. They

propose that theory can be used as a skeletal framework to guide the research process without entirely restricting or predicting the outcome. The challenge, therefore, becomes how to use induction in the face of theoretical concepts and Morse and Mitcham argue that this can be achieved through a continuous critical approach to the creation of codes and themes.

In this study, prior experience, knowledge and theoretical ideas were used as sensitising concepts from the beginning. Field educators' perspective on the factors influencing their practice had not been extensively explored previously, and therefore an exploratory approach was required. However, some way of deciding which avenues of inquiry might be profitable was necessary. At the beginning of the research, I was involved in supporting students and field educators during placements and therefore came to the study with relevant prior knowledge and experience. These factors certainly influenced the design of the semi-structured interviews but I was also concerned to ensure that significant aspects of the phenomena were not excluded from the interviews. Activity theory seemed to offer a conceptual framework that would ensure the significant dimensions of field educators' work would be considered. The objective of using activity theory was therefore not considered confirmatory, but rather it was used as a heuristic device, or frame of reference. The question schedule used in the individual interviews was informed by the key dimensions suggested by Engeström's (2001) conceptual model of activity, but the purpose of the interviews was not to test the validity of these theoretical ideas. As the analysis progressed, a critical approach was also adopted in an attempt to move beyond the conceptual limitations of activity theory.

Researchers from the quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods traditions adopt different approaches to theory to serve the objectives of their inquiry (Crotty, 1998). Theory may be used deductively to develop hypotheses at the start of the research, it may emerge following data analysis, or be generated in one phase to inform a second phase (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). In this research, theory was not used deductively to create hypotheses but rather employed as a framework to guide decisions about the topics to explore in the interviews that had the highest probability of assisting the inquiry. Activity theory suggested a conceptual model of the different components or dimensions of field education, and this was used as a foundation for the interviews. However, an inductive approach was also used during the analysis process, with the objective of revealing diverse findings.

## 3.10 Summary of methodology

In this chapter, I have articulated the epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of this research. I have discussed the various influences on different aspects of the inquiry and explained the connections between these elements with the objective of demonstrating the coherence of the research as a whole. The theoretical congruence and points of connection between the different elements of my research are illustrated in Figure 3-2.

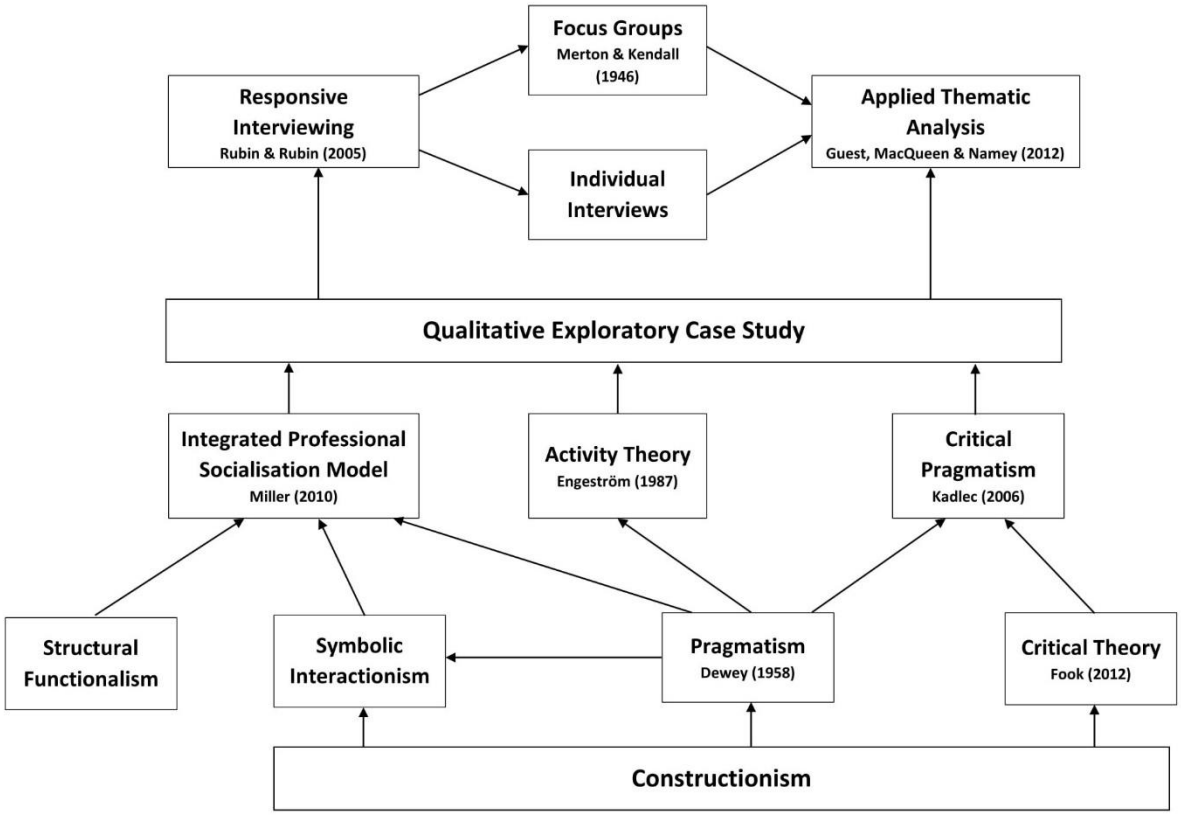


***Figure 3-2: Concept Map of Methodology and Research Design.***

Figure 3-2 depicts the connections between the various components of my methodology and research design. My research is underpinned by a constructionist epistemology that adopts the standpoint that reality is co-created by the interaction between field educators and the objects that they engage with in their environment to complete their work. Constructionism also suggests that multiple perspectives about field education practice will exist and should, therefore, be incorporated into the inquiry process. A number of theoretical perspectives inform different aspects of my research, all of which flow from a constructionist epistemology.

The central perspective that informed my research was pragmatism, in particular, the work of John Dewey. A pragmatic approach to research about field education meant that I focused on answering problems identified by field educators themselves and used the inquiry process to develop solutions that practitioners identified in focus groups as being applicable to the reality of practice. I adopted a critical version of pragmatism because this perspective provided explanations for the presence of marginalisation and tension in field education and framed the inquiry process as an opportunity to develop democratic dialogue that could lead to change between field educators and the traditional holders of power. A second pragmatic perspective, namely symbolic interactionism, particularly informed my understanding of the professional socialisation process for field educators. A symbolic interactionist perspective meant that I emphasised the decisions that individual practitioners make when they are transitioning to the role of field educator and the potential for learning and decisions about practice that might not be the intention of academics leading the professional development process. Recognising the limitations of symbolic interactionism, I utilised an integrated model of professional socialisation that incorporated the strengths of structural functionalism and an analysis of factors influencing socialisation extending both prior and subsequent to any formal training.

Although activity theory developed quite separately from pragmatism, informed by the work of Vygotsky and Leont'ev, this theoretical perspective shares many points of connection with pragmatism. Activity theory shares with pragmatism a focus on the interaction between subjects and objects in the development of meaning, an engagement with a variety of perspectives to identify solutions to identified environmental challenges and an interest in practical action to test these solutions. I particularly used activity theory in my research as a tool to help identify the elements of the activity of field educators that would need to be explored to identify points of tension or conflict that might be resolved through the process of inquiry.

Although constructionism, critical pragmatism, symbolic interactionism and activity theory provided conceptual tools that informed this research, they did not prescribe a certain design or specific methods that should be applied to the inquiry process. I elected to use a qualitative exploratory design and selected methods of data collection and analysis because of their congruence with the epistemological and theoretical foundations of the research, and their practical usefulness for answering the questions that I set out to answer. Responsive interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), as applied to

individual interviews and focus groups, was the primary approach I used during data collection, and applied thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) was the method I used to analyse the data. In Chapter 4 I explore in detail these specific methods, the overall research design, and the connections back to the theoretical foundations.

# 4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Having discussed in Chapter 3 the philosophical orientation, epistemology, theoretical influences and methodological rationale for this research, in this chapter I provide an explanation of the specific research design that was developed from these foundations. Qualitative researchers are presented with a wide array of options when it comes to deciding which methods to use when collecting and analysing data. Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 5–9) have reviewed a range of taxonomies that describe the methods used in qualitative research and their relationship to each other. These authors note that whilst similarities between different research traditions do exist, there are also significant implications for various aspects of a research endeavour from selecting any single approach. Any methodology utilised in a specific research project is also founded on epistemology (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 2), whether explicit or implicit. In the following discussion I therefore articulate the research methods that I chose for this study and demonstrate the congruence with the epistemology of the research as a whole.

Setting out a description of research methods in this format may give an appearance of a neat linear, predetermined process. In reality the design evolved during the research, as I responsively reviewed and revised decisions during the data collection and analysis process. This flexible approach was informed by the principle within pragmatism that truth is not static but constantly evolving (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). In this study the process of my engagement with the participants and their responses about the challenges in field education highlighted the contextual nature of the focus of the inquiry and altered my thinking about whether to concentrate on a local or national analysis. As questions arose during the research, I adopted appropriate methods for

answering those questions, even if these were not part of the original design. For example, my original plan of inquiry involved a mixed methods approach using individual interviews followed by a national online survey of field educators. However, following initial analysis of the interviews I became interested in how to respond to the issues identified and it became clear that a survey would not be an appropriate method for answering this question. I therefore made the decision to focus on a local study and use focus groups to engage field educators in an exploration of responses to the themes emerging from the individual interviews. The methods employed in a research study should align with the purpose of the research (Seidman, 2013) and my objective was to use an iterative process of checking methods against the evolving purpose to ensure the research did not become constrained by an overly restrictive methodology.

The aim of my research was to explore the factors that mediate the work of social work field educators, to inform the development of future field education practice. In particular, the research set out to answer the following central questions:

- What factors do social workers in Canterbury, Aotearoa New Zealand, report as mediating their learning to practice as field educators?
- What factors do social work field educators in Canterbury, Aotearoa New Zealand, report as mediating field education practice?
- What opportunities do social work field educators in Canterbury, Aotearoa New Zealand, identify for the development of field education practice?

I used activity theory as a tool to help identify the potential range of factors that might need to be considered. I focused on exploring the influence of a number of cultural-historical factors on the practice of field educators: historical forms of field education; language used about field education; tools used by field educators; attitudes of field educators; rules related to field education; communities that field educators belong to; and designations of field education tasks.

If the purpose of my research had been to investigate how much experience field educators have, or the amount of training they have undertaken to work with students, then a survey may have been an appropriate method to employ. A quasi-experimental design might have been more appropriate to investigate the impact of a field educator training programme on student's experience of supervision. Alternatively, investigating

the behaviour of field educators in supervision sessions might have required participant observation or digital recording of supervision sessions. However, the focus of my inquiry was the subjective experience of field educators, the meaning they attach to the various factors that influence their work with students and their ideas about the development of field education practice. This inquiry necessitated hearing the stories and descriptions of meaning associated with field educators, and therefore a two-phase data collection strategy was adopted that included 20 semi-structured interviews and five focus groups with field educators.

## 4.1 Interview Methodology

The process of two people asking each other questions to gain insight into their respective understanding of the world is at the core of enquiry (Seidman, 2013). However, qualitative research interviews, either with individuals or groups, have characteristics that are different to casual conversations due to the planned focus on a discussion of abstract ideas between people where one holds more power than the other (Shaw & Holland, 2014). A research interview is a process that values the stories that people tell and provides insight into their subjective interpretation of their social context. “Every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness” (Vygotsky, 1987, pp236-237). Interviews were, therefore, a core qualitative tool for investigating subjective experience and meaning, and an appropriate method for hearing the stories of field educators.

Although focused conversation might appear to develop the skills required for interviewing, it would be a mistake to assume that the necessary competence is somehow naturally occurring. Interviewing requires the development of specific skills so that the voice of the interviewer does not dominate (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). When selecting a research method, it is therefore important to consider the skills of the researcher to ensure that they are effective in applying the chosen methods. Interviews, both with individuals and groups, are core activities for social work practitioners that require the development of particular skills. In my own case, I developed interviewing skills over more than twenty years working in a variety of social work roles with adult clients. Some of these roles have involved interviewing in climates of hostility or in the context of serious mental illness, and have therefore been particularly challenging. However, Shaw and Holland (2014) have questioned the assumption that social workers automatically make good research interviewers because interviews in a practice context

often have a relatively narrow focus and research interviews require broader skills. Although the two types of interviewing may demand some unique skills, interviews in social work practice do have many similarities with research interviews (Scourfield, 2001) and require the practitioner to develop skills that can be transferred into the research context. Whilst the focus of an interview is quite different in the context of research compared to social work intervention, certain core skills, such as the ability to establish rapport in a short space of time or disciplines around the avoidance of leading questions, are certainly applicable in an academic context.

## 4.2 Responsive Interviewing

I adopted an approach to interviewing that was drawn from the model developed by Rubin and Rubin (2005), called responsive interviewing. “The responsive interviewing method relies heavily on the interpretive constructionist philosophy, mixed with a bit of critical theory and then shaped by the practical needs of doing interviews” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 30). The responsive interviewing approach is therefore consistent with the foundations of this research project, which also draws from constructionist philosophy and a critical version of pragmatism. Constructionist interviewers are interested in the specific lens, or perspective that people have on their social world. Critical interviewers are also interested in the perspective of individuals but in addition choose to examine structural issues and use research to redress power imbalance in a social setting (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Three key features are evident in the responsive interviewing method (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Firstly, the approach emphasises the relationship between the researcher and the participant. The quality of this relationship has a strong determining influence on the quality of the data that is produced during the interview. Researchers must also recognise that the interview is shaped and directed by the participant as much as by the researcher and a degree of reciprocity is therefore involved. Secondly, the goal of responsive interviewing is to generate depth of understanding. The approach is far more concerned with depth than breadth or transferability. Researchers should follow up on what the participant says to develop a deeper understanding or to clarify meaning. Thirdly, the design of studies using this approach is one that remains flexible from beginning to end. Researchers must pursue interesting lines of inquiry suggested by participant responses, rather than sticking to a prescribed schedule of questions. Pauses for reflection and a willingness to change direction are built into the research design.

Flexibility is also evident in the questioning style used by the researcher. Some may choose to minimise their influence in the interview, whereas others may adopt a more challenging approach and question tensions or conflict in the participant's answers. The degree of flexibility and spontaneity in questioning may also vary from one researcher to the next and still be consistent with a responsive interviewing methodology.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) identify a five-stage process for responsive interviewing that were reflected in this research. Initially, the interviewer focuses on establishing rapport, building confidence and ensuring the participant understands the purpose and ethical procedures of the study. In the interviews for this research, the initial process of establishing rapport was swift because I already knew the participants in my role as a field education co-ordinator. I was, therefore, able to conduct the process of explaining the purpose and ethical procedure of the study through a natural conversation. The initial interview question then encouraged participants to talk confidently about themselves. I asked participants to talk about their experience of different field education roles, which allowed for some recognition of their experience. The main body of the interview involved some more challenging questions and at times a degree of emotional content as they reflected on their own experience as a student on placement. The final phase of the interviews involved moving away from the emotion and encouraging participants to think about potential future developments, before asking if they had any questions about the research.

## 4.3 Focus Groups

A second approach to interviewing, namely focus groups, was used for data collection in phase two of the research. The history of focus groups is generally traced back to the work that Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert K Merton undertook at Columbia University to analyse people's responses to radio and film broadcasts designed to increase morale during World War 2 (Merton, 1987). An influential paper written by Merton and one of his students, Patricia Kendall, sets out the basic procedure for what they named "focussed interviews" (Merton & Kendall, 1946). In this paper no distinction is drawn between individual and group interviews but the method became established over the subsequent 40 years as a popular group inquiry process used widely in market research, and later adopted more broadly in social science research (Jayasekara, 2012), particularly in exploratory designs (Doody, Slevin, & Taggart, 2012). However, Merton himself considered that much market research was often a misuse of the original design

of focussed interviews because of the lack of combining the qualitative findings of focus groups with results from quantitative research (Merton, 1987). Perhaps Merton's concern can be explained as originating from a time when qualitative research findings were generally viewed as insufficient if not corroborated by those obtained through quantitative methods, but it is clear that in his original conception of focussed interviews he believed that efficacy was enhanced by combining different data gathering methods.

Merton and Kendall (1946) identified four key characteristics of focussed interviews. As focus group methodology has developed a variety of other descriptions have been proposed but all contain common features (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996) that are remarkably consistent with the components of Merton and Kendall's (1946) original definition. The four original characteristics of focused interviews are evident in the focus groups conducted for this research. Firstly, the participants in this study were individuals with direct experience of field education. Secondly, the factors influencing field educator practice had already been investigated through the individual interviews and the interview guide for the focus groups was then based on the analysis from phase one. Finally, the group interviews were focused on participant's direct experience so that the emerging theoretical ideas could be teased out and unanticipated responses identified.

Focus groups are consistent with the qualitative paradigm (Vaughn et al., 1996) that guides this research because they allowed the investigation of a range of different constructions and reconstructions of reality (Barbour, 2007). Focus groups are not intended to produce quantitative findings that can be generalised to a wider population (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007) but rather are used when researchers are interested in representing a local perspective. The interactions between the researcher and participants are also viewed as a knowledge co-creation process. Indeed, focus groups can be seen as offering a research method that enables marginalised groups to participate in this knowledge creation process (Jayasekara, 2012). Focus group research is therefore also consistent with a critical perspective (Kevern & Webb, 2001) because it democratises the investigation as well as using the interaction process to create depth of meaning. In this study, the focus groups enabled field educators themselves to identify potential responses to the findings from the initial interviews and to indicate when they felt certain ideas were impractical in their own context.

Whilst focus groups are often thought of as a quick, and therefore economic, research method (Stewart et al., 2007), it was important that these facts were not the determinants for selecting this approach, and I gave careful consideration to whether other methods would more appropriately serve the research objectives. One of the strengths of the focus groups was that they produced a large volume of data that was specific to the topic of interest. However, this data could be considered less naturalistic than might be obtained through direct observation because of the reliance on self-reports of past experience (Morgan, 1997). In the case of field education, it would be highly resource intensive to observe individual field educators interacting with students due to the one-to-one nature of much of this work. Therefore, although a focus group was a less natural setting, it provided access to descriptions of field educator's experiences that would otherwise have been difficult to observe. A second strength of the focus groups was that the interaction between participants generated new thinking and insights that might not have occurred with individual interviews. However, once again this strength had a corresponding weakness because this interaction could unduly bias the findings (Morgan, 1997). Managing these challenges in group settings is a skill that is familiar to many social work practitioners and I had experience of this kind of work. I paid careful attention to the group process in my research, encouraging participants to express a range of views and directly asking initially less forthcoming members for their opinion, so as to mitigate the risk of strong vocal participants unduly influencing the discussion. However, the risk of a biased discussion led by more vocal field educators was necessary so that all participants would benefit from the stimulation provided by hearing each other's responses. The purpose of using focus groups was not to reach some consensus and present a single view of reality, but rather to encourage the generation of new thinking and express the range and intensity of feeling amongst participants (Doody et al., 2012).

The design of focus groups takes considerable planning and is often more complex than it at first appears (Redmond & Curtis, 2009). Focus group participants are generally selected on a purposive basis (Doody et al., 2012) because of the requirement for participants to have specific experience and for the group to be relatively homogeneous. Focus group size varies (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011), six or eight participants being common (Doody et al., 2012), but smaller groups have also been shown to be effective (Toner, 2009). Familiarity between participants may be helpful although some argue that strangers are more likely to express views openly if they feel they will not see each

other again (Redmond & Curtis, 2009). Focus group interviews normally last from ninety minutes to two and a half hours and approximately twelve questions are generally sufficient for this time period because the interviewer will also ask follow-up questions (Stewart et al., 2007). An interview guide should be prepared that normally begins with easy open questions and moves to more complex or sensitive issues, although a number of approaches are possible. During the interview, the researcher needs to be mindful of being non-directive and allowing participants to express themselves, whilst also encouraging them to be specific and provide enough depth in their descriptions of a range of responses to the topic (Merton & Kendall, 1946). Researchers must ensure that their questioning or non-verbal behaviour does not lead participants to conclude that certain answers are preferred, which necessitates a highly reflective approach to the interview process (Vaughn et al., 1996).

Focus groups present particular challenges in relation to informed consent and confidentiality, although some would argue that all small-scale qualitative research has an inherent risk that participants may be identified through their responses even when anonymised (Helgesson, 2015). It may be particularly tempting for participants to gossip about the content of a focus group when they are part of the same work or social network (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). Tolich (2009) has gone so far as to suggest that it is impossible for researchers to guarantee confidentiality when conducting focus groups. Although informing participants of the risks of participating in a focus group may jeopardise their consent (Helgesson, 2015), a clear statement of the limits of confidentiality and lack of formal sanctions on participants may be the only truly ethical practice (Tolich, 2009). In this research, I have adapted the statement of informed consent proposed by Tolich and incorporated it in the consent form (Appendix M) that all focus group participants signed. This statement not only made clear the limitations on confidentiality but also the ethical responsibilities that participants had towards both themselves and other participants.

## 4.4 Sampling

There are a number of key principles for sampling within qualitative research; intense study of small numbers, purposive approaches, conceptually driven sampling, iterative processes and a rationale for selection (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). Decisions about sampling are primarily driven by a concern to speak to people who have specific experience or knowledge that is related to the focus of the study (Rapley, 2014). This

stands in contrast to quantitative research where the gold standard is normally the randomised controlled trial and a focus on representativeness and ultimately the generalisability of the findings (Marshall, 1996). However, qualitative researchers are less concerned with whether findings can be generalised and are more interested in exploring the chosen topic in depth and obtaining information-rich data (Higginbottom, 2004). For this reason, decisions about whether results can be applied in other settings are often left to the audience (Rapley, 2014).

Strategies for sampling are numerous and it can be overwhelming for the researcher to decide which approach might be the best in their particular study (Rapley, 2014). Different approaches to sampling overlap and researchers must make choices on the basis of the research aim, methodological approach and method of analysis (Tracy, 2013). Robinson (2014) has proposed a useful model that was used to assist critical thinking about sampling for this research by examining four dimensions; study population, sample size, selection criteria and recruitment strategy.

The first dimension to consider in Robinson's (2014) model is the study population, which in the case of this research was qualified social workers in Canterbury who have experience of working as a field educator during a student placement. Deciding how tightly to define the criteria for the study population has an impact on the level of homogeneity across the participants. Certain methodologies might favour a high degree of participant similarity, but in the case of exploratory research, it is useful to have a heterogeneous group that provides an opportunity to identify a range of experience. At the beginning of this research, I surmised that there may be differences between the experience of field educators on the basis of work setting, experience, or culture and so I used a sampling frame to ensure a diverse group was recruited for the research.

Sample size was the second dimension I considered in relation to sampling for this inquiry (Robinson, 2014). If a research project aims to generalise the findings then it becomes much more important to have a large sample size. However, my research was exploratory in nature and specifically focused on generating results to be applied in the Canterbury region. Therefore, sample size was less significant, although enough individual interviews were required so that a range of field educator experiences would be captured. Qualitative sampling is often iterative, rather than being defined at the outset (Higginbottom, 2004), and steps may have to be taken to address gaps in the data. I initially decided to work with the eighteen participants who self-identified, but later

arranged two additional interviews to address gaps in the data from Māori field educators and from practitioners in statutory health settings.

When it came to the focus groups the concern with specific categories of experience became less significant and I used thematic saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006) as a method for deciding when to finish sampling. Although the term saturation originally arose within grounded theory, it has been adopted by a broad range of qualitative researchers (Cleary et al., 2014). Saturation is not just about quantity of data but is also about the quality of data, or in other words, the aim is to produce a large amount of data that is also multi-layered, complex and detailed (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Following five focus groups (see pages 96 and 98 for details of recruitment and participants), I was unable to identify new themes that would alter the codebook and so I took this as the point of saturation. Although achieving saturation can be problematic because the potential for new themes may be endless (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013), research has shown that a stable set of thematic codes can be achieved with a relatively small number of data collection events (Guest et al., 2006).

The third question posed by Robinson (2014) is for the researcher to decide what strategy they will use to select the cases. As already mentioned, at the beginning of the research I identified a number of groups of field educators as potentially having slightly different experiences. A stratified purposive sampling strategy was therefore indicated, using the categories of employing organisation size, field of practice, level of experience and cultural background. Overall, my approach to sampling in this research was based on self-selection as it was expected that it would be quite difficult to recruit busy social workers to the study. For this reason, the stratification criteria were intended to act as a guideline to help achieve a heterogeneous group, rather than a rigid set of criteria. However, my choice to follow up additional participants was based on a concern that key areas of unique experience should be reflected in the group of participants, in this case, cultural perspectives and views from practitioners in large health organisations.

The final issue addressed in the sampling process was a consideration of how to recruit participants to the study (Robinson, 2014). Debates within the literature about advertising, use of the Internet, or snowballing were not relevant in this research. All field educators within Canterbury were highly likely to be included on one of the databases maintained by the two primary social work education providers in the region.

Once I had obtained support for the study from these institutions, it was possible to send a direct email to each field educator inviting them to participate in the study.

## 4.5 Interview Recruitment

Both the social work education programmes recognised by the SWRB and located in Canterbury, namely the University of Canterbury (UC) and the Ara Institute of Canterbury (Ara) [Previously Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology], were asked to assist in recruitment for phase one of the study. The Programme Leader at UC and the Programme Manager at Ara were sent a letter (Appendix B) seeking permission for details of the study to be circulated to the list of field educators that had worked with their programme since 2006. Both institutions agreed to forward the recruitment email to the field educators listed on their databases.

Given the fact that I had been the field education co-ordinator at Ara, many of the potential participants were likely to be known to me. I acknowledged this within the recruitment emails and the information sheets provided to potential participants explained the opportunity for participants to withdraw at any stage of the research. Invitation emails (Appendix C) were sent by staff at UC and Ara to 186 field educators that had an email address on either of the two databases. Field educators were also asked to forward the invitation email on to any colleagues who might be interested so it is impossible to know exactly how many practitioners may have received the invitation. Those professionals interested in participating in the research were asked to contact me directly should they have any queries about the study.

Responses to the recruitment emails were initially slower to arrive than I expected and I was concerned that it may be difficult to identify enough participants. However, within four months, 18 field educators had made contact indicating their willingness to be interviewed. Given the limited number of respondents, I decided to invite all the interested field educators to participate in the research. Despite the lack of a selection process, I checked the details provided by participants to ensure that their profiles represented a range of field educators from statutory agencies and non-government organisations, different fields of practice, both academic institutions and cultural backgrounds. My first concern about the profile of the initial list of participants was that although ten participants were from statutory agencies, nine of these were from the Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki (MVCOT – Child Youth and

Family at the time of the research), the national child protection agency, and only one from the Canterbury District Health Board (CDHB), the organisation responsible for regional state health-care services. I identified the lack of statutory health representation and absence of any field educators from the physical health field of practice as a limitation. My second concern was that all participants identified themselves as Pākehā. For this reason, I decided to conduct two further interviews to address these gaps. Using knowledge of the local field educators gained from working as the Ara field education co-ordinator, two practitioners were identified as meeting the criteria necessary to complement the existing participant profile. The first field educator worked in one of the hospitals in Christchurch and the second was a Māori practitioner working in the addictions sector. I sent an email to both practitioners asking if they would consider participating in the research. I sent exactly the same information in the email as had been provided with the original recruitment process to ensure informed consent. Both field educators indicated their willingness to participate in the research. Although this method of recruitment was less than ideal, I considered the risk of coercion and bias to be no more significant than with other participants since I was well known through my role as a field education co-ordinator and so these concerns were already present.

## 4.6 Interview Participants

The final group of 20 participants included 19 who identified as Pākehā and one as Māori. The group included 12 women and eight men. 11 participants worked for statutory services (9 MVCOT and 2 CDHB). The remaining eight participants were employed by eight different non-government organisations. Participants represented a range of fields of practice including child protection, child and family support, youth work, physical health, mental health, addictions, community development, residential care, staff development and management. 17 (85%) participants had provided field education supervision for a student within the previous two years and the remaining three (15%) had provided field education within the previous five years but not in the last two. Seven participants (37%) had been working as field educators for five years or less, six (31%) for between six and ten years and six (32%) for more than ten years (Figure 4-1).

All participants had provided field education for more than one student, nine (47%) for four or less students, four (21%) between five and nine students and six (32%) for 10 or more students (Figure 4-2). 19 participants had provided field education for both UC

and Ara but one had only worked with Ara as she did not meet the UC field educator criteria.

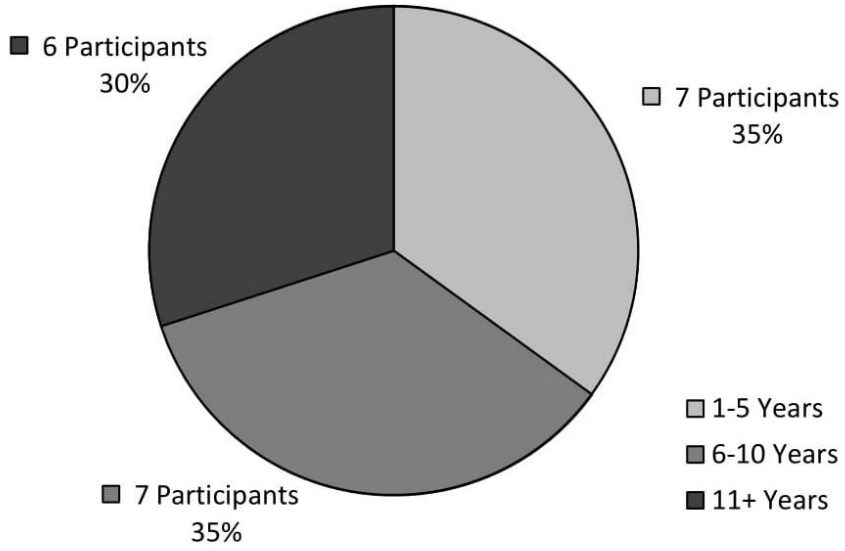


***Figure 4-1: Interview participants' years of field educator experience.***

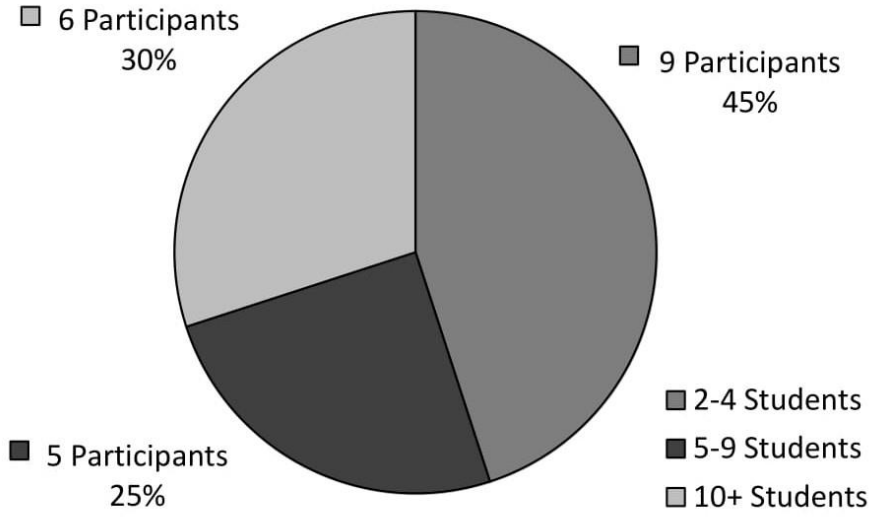


***Figure 4-2: Number of students supported by interview participants.***

Figure 4-1 indicates that the spread of experience amongst the interview participants, in terms of years working as a field educator, was roughly even. However, figure 4-2 indicates that almost a half of participants had supported four or less students, suggesting that some had worked as a field educator for many years but did not have a student each year. Overall, participants were an experienced group of field educators who had significant knowledge of field education over many years.

## 4.7 Focus Group Recruitment

Recruitment for the focus groups conducted in the second phase of the research involved participants who had been interviewed in the first phase and field educators who were new to the research. I invited all the participants from Phase 1 of the research by email (Appendix D) in late October 2016 to participate in a focus group. My email explained that despite their participation in Phase 1 there was no obligation to participate in a focus group and the field educator's decision would have no bearing on their work with any academic institution. Participants self-selected whether to participate in a focus group by sending a reply email expressing their interest.

I also invited field educators who had not previously been interviewed to participate in a focus group. Once again, I asked the social work departments at UC and Ara to assist with the recruitment of additional field educators for Phase 2 of the research. I sent the letter in Appendix E to the programme leaders of both institutions to secure the support of the relevant field education co-ordinators. I asked the field education co-ordinators of both institutions to send a copy of the recruitment email in Appendix F to the field educators on their database. I identified considerable overlap between the two databases because both institutions used many of the same field educators. The timing of the initial invitations from the two institutions, therefore, acted as a form of follow-up, with Ara sending a recruitment email in early November, followed a month later by one from UC. Given the fact that I had been the field education co-ordinator for Ara, this was again declared in the recruitment email and the information sheet explained the right to withdraw at any stage. I advised participants that their involvement in a focus group would in no way impact on their work as a field educator. Participants again self-selected to participate by sending an email expressing their interest.

The response rate for Phase 2 was lower than I anticipated and may have been hampered by the time of year. I sent the initial invitations in November and December 2016, and it is possible that field educators were disinclined to make extra commitments in the run-up to Christmas and the summer break. Four of the participants from Phase 1 responded to the initial invitation and agreed to participate in a focus group. Six other field educators also expressed an interest following the first recruitment email. I arranged for a second invitation to be sent out by Ara and UC in early February 2017 and this generated a further four participants.

Due to the low response rate, I made an application to the UC Human Ethics Committee for an amendment to the ethics approval. This was approved (Appendix A), allowing me to approach managers of social services agencies to assist with recruitment (Appendix G). My intention was to make it easier for field educators to participate by offering to hold focus groups at their place of work. I approached social work managers at Christchurch Hospital and the Specialist Mental Health Services, both part of the CDHB, and to MVCOT. I selected these organisations because they have a number of field educators all working in the same office. Unfortunately, no response was received from one of these agencies and so a group did not go ahead at that work site. Only one field educator from the second organisation offered to participate and so it was not possible to organise a focus group in her workplace, although she was invited to a generic group. The third organisation was very helpful and six field educators offered to participate once formal ethical approval had been received from their senior management team. A further opportunity presented itself when I was asked to talk about my research at the local branch meeting of ANZASW. Three field educators offered to participate in a focus group following this meeting, resulting in a total of 23 potential participants.

Further recruitment problems emerged even once the focus groups had been booked. In the second focus group, one participant did not arrive due to workload pressures. The group continued with the three participants that had arrived, out of respect for their commitment to the research. In the debrief of this group, it was noted that although the group had been small, in some ways it was more effective because it allowed all the participants to contribute equally within the allocated time frame of 90 minutes. On the original day planned for the fourth focus group, only one participant arrived and three people sent apologies due to workload pressures. In this instance, the group was cancelled and the one available participant agreed to join the next focus group. In the replacement fourth focus group, two participants did not arrive due to pressing work commitments. In the final group, one person failed to arrive but the group continued with four participants. Three of the five field educators who failed to arrive at a focus group attempted to join a later meeting, although two did not arrive a second time for similar reasons. These difficulties illustrate the challenges faced by field educators in terms of their workload, and the impact this can have on participating in development processes such as this research.

The five focus groups I conducted were all smaller than originally planned, raising questions about the validity of the data. However, O'Gorman (2001) has argued that researchers need to respond to the unforeseen contextual factors that arise during a research project and this may lead to changes in the design. It is important that these changes are conducted in a reflexive manner that considers the impact on methodological coherence, but research must be responsive. This argument has been used by Toner (2009) as the basis for using very small focus groups in social work research with marginalised populations. Toner makes the strong point that "the risk of having difficulty with recruitment of participants from historically oppressed groups is great, and to cancel a group because of small size, or to discard the data that emerge, would be an incredible loss of situated knowledge and an affront to the people who sought to participate" (2009, p. 190). Although field educators may not generally be described as an oppressed group, my analysis will identify the marginalised position that they hold, and the impact of workload and time pressures on their ability to engage in developmental work. Therefore, due to the difficulty in recruiting participants, their marginal position in relation to both social service teams and academic institutions, and the importance of hearing their voices in the development of practice, I decided to continue with the focus groups despite their small size.

## 4.8 Focus Group Participants

***Table 4-1: Composition of focus groups.***

| Focus Group | # Participants | # Statutory | # NGO |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| 2 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| 3 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| 4 | 5 | 4 | 1 |
| 5 | 3 | 0 | 3 |

Ultimately, five focus groups were conducted involving a total of 19 participants, representing a range of levels of experience, agency types and institutional affiliation. Nine participants worked for statutory services (4 MVCOT and 5 CDHB). The remaining ten participants were employed by nine different non-government organisations. The composition of each focus group is shown in Table 4-1.

Four participants were male and 15 female, reflecting the fact that there are more women than men in the social work profession. One participant was Māori and the remainder Pākehā. Participants represented a range of fields of practice including child protection, child and family support, youth work, mental health, community development and management. The majority of participants were very experienced social workers with 13 having been qualified for more than 10 years. Six participants (32%) had been working as field educators for five years or less, five (26%) for between six and ten years and eight (42%) for more than ten years (Figure 4-3).

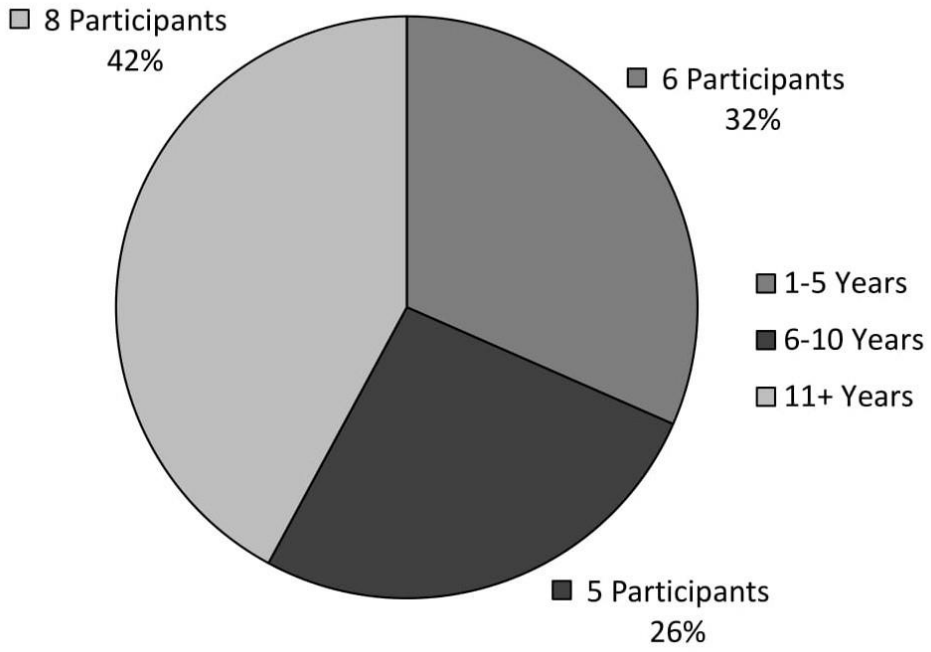


***Figure 4-3: Focus group participants' years of field educator experience.***

16 (84%) participants had provided field education supervision for a student within the previous two years and the remaining three (16%) had provided field education within the previous five years but not in the last two. All participants had provided field education for more than one student, five (26%) for four or less students, six (32%) between five and nine students and eight (42%) for 10 or more students (Figure 4-4). 14 participants had provided field education for more than one academic institution, including UC, Ara, Massey University and the University of Otago. Two participants had only ever worked with Ara and three only with UC.

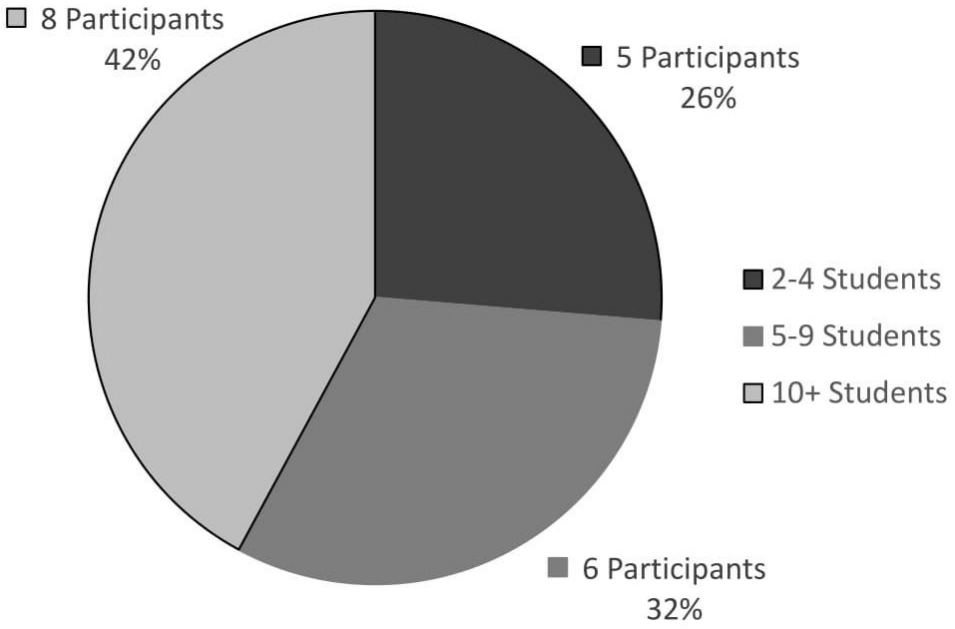


***Figure 4-4: Number of students supported by focus group participants.***

Figures 4-3 and 4-4 indicate that although there was a range of experience amongst the focus group participants, over 40% were very experienced field educators who had worked with more than ten students and multiple academic institutions. This may have been the case because these field educators were particularly committed to the development of practice and made the time to participate despite their heavy workloads and limited support from their employers. It is possible that this group unduly influenced the findings from the focus groups and it would be interesting in future research to explore the differences between the views of field educators dependent on the level of their experience.

## 4.9 Interview Design

I made individual arrangements with each participant to conduct an interview at a mutually convenient time and place. Interviews were confirmed by email which included an information sheet (Appendix H) and a copy of the participant consent form (Appendix I). I conducted the interviews over a four-month period from June to September 2012 either at my office or the field educator's work place. Interviews began with a review of the information sheet and participants were asked to sign the consent form. All participants agreed for interviews to be recorded on a voice recorder to assist in subsequent transcription and analysis processes. Participants did not select their own pseudonym but these were assigned later.

Whilst the interview approach was based on the responsive interviewing model, the main questions in the interviews were shaped by the theoretical influences discussed in Chapter 3. I identified questions to structure the conversation but still used these in a flexible manner so that interesting issues identified by participants could be responded to and new questions introduced. The questions were not designed to be asked in a rigid manner but acted as a guide for the researcher to ensure that key areas of enquiry were not overlooked.

I used Engeström's (2001) triangular model of activity to identify the key areas of enquiry in the interviews. The model contains six nodes (Engeström, 1987); the subject, mediating artefacts and object of activity, first described by Leont'ev, augmented with Engeström's inclusion of rules, community and division of labour. I used this model as a heuristic tool to assist in the development of the interview schedule. Activity theory is also concerned with the previous versions of an activity and the potential for change within the system. I, therefore, included the influence of history and future challenges in the questions.

The interview schedule contained five question categories designed to explore the dimensions of the activity system. Firstly, The *Division of Labour* was explored through questions about the roles within field education. The *Subject* of the activity was then examined through questions about the participant's motivation to be a field educator and their professional development for the role. The third category of questions examined the *Object* of the activity and the *Tools* used by discussing the participants' view of the objectives of working with students and the methods they would use in practice. The *Rules and Community* were then explored through questions related to the policies and rules impacting field education practice and the collegial support for field educators. The final category of questions was designed to examine the *History* of field education by discussing past experience and future challenges for the field educator. The 18 individual questions (Appendix J) were designed to encourage field educators to talk about their experience of the different dimensions of field education activity. Bryman (2012) suggests that it is unhelpful to use overly prescribed interview schedules and recommends a small number of general questions. An open-ended approach was also necessary because this phase of the research was exploratory and needed to respond to the issues identified by the participants themselves. It was, therefore, important to determine whether the interview schedule allowed for a conversational and exploratory

approach and that an appropriate balance had been achieved between depth in the interview and the duration for participants.

## 4.10 Interview Pre-Testing

Prior to commencing recruitment, I pre-tested the interview schedule with three field educators to determine if it allowed for an exploratory approach and whether the questions elicited the desired areas of discussion. I selected two participants who had recently started working as lecturers in my team because they would not be participating in the main interviews. I selected a third participant because he was on the Advisory Committee for the Bachelor programme that I taught in and therefore would also be inappropriate for the main interviews. He was also selected because he was Māori and would be able to provide advice from a cultural perspective.

The pre-test interviews revealed no major concerns with the interview schedule. It was possible to adopt a conversational approach and follow the lead of the participants if there were particularly interesting lines of enquiry. No culturally specific concerns were identified by participants. Pre-test interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and this was felt to be manageable by participants. The interviews produced some interesting discussions and it was disappointing that this data could not be included in the actual analysis. However, it was reassuring that the questions produced the kind of rich, multi-faceted responses that had been hoped for.

## 4.11 Focus Group Design

One week prior to each focus group, I sent participants an information sheet (Appendix K), along with a summary of the key findings from the interviews conducted in phase one of the research and starter questions for the focus group (Appendix L). This allowed participants to familiarise themselves with the ideas that would be discussed. The sequencing of questions was then structured to allow participants to share some overall thoughts about the findings from the interviews before more specific questions were posed about the details of the theoretical ideas.

I assumed the role of moderator in each of the focus groups and explained the objectives, process and ethical considerations at the start of the session. All participants signed a statement of informed consent (Appendix M) that set out the risks of participation, limitations on confidentiality and ethical responsibilities of being

involved. My role involved asking the questions in the designed sequence and for making decisions about how long to allow participants to discuss any single topic. I also took responsibility for the audio equipment and for checking the quality of the recording immediately following the group. Handwritten notes were taken during the focus group primarily for the purpose of facilitating the discussion, but also for later reflection. Although these notes were not specifically intended for analysis purposes, they were retained and reviewed as part of the debriefing and analysis process. At the end of each focus group, I provided a verbal summary of the key messages raised during the discussion and asked participants to comment and highlight any points of disagreement or clarification if necessary. This participant verification process minimised the possibility of misinterpreting the key points made by the group.

An assistant moderator was also employed for the focus groups, and she completed the confidentiality agreement (Appendix N). The assistant moderator produced a participant seating log and took detailed notes of the discussion and any significant events during the group. These notes included the participant name and initial words of each comment to assist the transcriber in identifying which participant was speaking. Immediately following each focus group, I met with the assistant moderator and undertook a debriefing process following the method described by Krueger (1998). Written notes of these discussions were produced for review during the analysis process. The first step in the debriefing process involved recording some contextual information about the membership of the focus group, any important influences on the discussion and any significant points of note. The assistant moderator and I then reviewed our notes related to each question in turn and agreed on the key points made during the discussion. Having agreed on the key points with the assistant, I then produced a written summary. I later reviewed this written record prior to conducting any further focus groups. In this way, the questioning for later focus groups was modified by the findings from the debriefing process. A written summary of the focus group discussion was emailed to all participants in the relevant focus group and seven days was allowed for participants to provide any feedback on the content. No participant requested any changes to the written summary of their group and so the analysis went ahead.

## 4.12 Transcription

Transcription is a central process in qualitative research and yet limited investigation of this process has been undertaken (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). However, it is

clear that due to the human component of the transcription process, errors can frequently occur (Gibbs, 2007). Steps can be taken to minimise these errors, for example using quality equipment, briefing the transcriber, and checks once the process is complete (Gibbs, 2007). Transcription itself is a translation process that impacts on the analysis and researchers must make decisions about the most appropriate method of transcription dependent on the objectives of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Naturalised approaches lead to highly detailed transcripts that notate every minor pause, breath or tone of voice (Oliver. et al., 2005). However, I used a denaturalised approach for this research because I wanted to analyse the substance of the interviews and focus groups rather than analyse specific forms of speech. Whilst naturalised transcription can provide a rich source of data for analysis, it has been criticised for implying a realist orientation (Oliver. et al., 2005) that is not consistent with the constructionist perspective of this research.

I used a high-quality digital recording device to record all interviews and focus groups. This enabled easy storage of the recordings and also meant that sections of interviews could be reviewed to compare to the transcription and later analysis. I employed a professional transcriber to complete verbatim transcripts of each interview and focus group. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement prior to undertaking any work (Appendix N). The transcriber was briefed about the purpose of the research prior to the individual interviews. A copy of the focus group running record taken by the assistant moderator was also provided to the transcriber in phase two of the research to assist in identifying the speaker during each part of the focus group audio recordings. I instructed the transcriber to use a denaturalised approach for both individual interviews and focus groups and therefore to ignore all language fillers, such as ‘um’, ‘er’ or ‘ah’, but otherwise to produce as accurate a transcript as possible. Sections that were unclear in any recording were noted in the transcription so that these could be reviewed and edited where possible. I read each transcription in full to develop familiarity with the content before I began any coding and also to check for errors.

I did not provide copies of individual interview transcripts to participants because the verification process was undertaken within the focus groups. However, I did email focus group transcripts to any participant who had identified on their consent form that they would like to review a full transcript. No participants requested changes to the transcripts and so the analysis process continued.

## 4.13 Selecting Thematic Analysis

In their discussion of responsive interviewing, Rubin and Rubin (2005) identify a process for analysis that involves the identification of themes within the data. Thematic analysis is a foundational qualitative method and the requisite skills are common to other qualitative methodologies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In fact, thematic procedures for analysing qualitative data could be considered generic skills for researchers (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Perhaps because it is a tool that qualitative researchers use so commonly, thematic analysis is often not seen as a specific method in its own right and researchers may claim to be utilising other methods when describing their methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis is not necessarily constrained by any particular pre-existing theoretical position and allows for flexibility in application (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, this should not be taken to imply that the theoretical position of a researcher using thematic analysis is unimportant or does not need to be clearly articulated. In my research, the constructionist epistemology and theoretical perspective of critical pragmatism led to an interest in the meanings people attach to their experience of interacting with their environment, how they find solutions to the problems they encounter, and the way in which power is used to limit the choices about possible courses of action. Activity theory also influenced my approach, and this model sensitised me to certain conflict themes that are frequently present within an activity system.

In a discussion about generic qualitative analysis in the discipline of social work, Connolly (2003) proposes a stepwise process that involves open coding, generation of themes, increasing abstraction until conceptual categories emerge, followed by the identification of theoretical ideas. This process is consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2006) description of generic thematic analysis, which involves the identification, analysis and reporting of patterns within datasets. This approach is informed by Grounded Theory but does not have the same requirement for theory building. Indeed, Connolly (2003) identifies that her approach to teaching thematic analysis draws on the work of Anselm Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), but it appears to adopt a more flexible approach that can be applied to the range of social work research interests. The procedures for analysing themes within a number of different methodologies have significant points of commonality.

Applied Thematic Analysis [ATA] (Guest et al., 2012) explicitly attempts to synthesise the strengths of different approaches to analysing themes within data that have been developed within positivism, interpretivism, grounded theory and phenomenology. ATA is an inductive approach that incorporates objectives and interests from each of these traditions but is not restricted by any single theory. Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) have attempted to incorporate a range of perspectives and to focus on practical solutions to challenges within data analysis. Whilst ATA is a flexible methodology that draws on a variety of other approaches to research, it also provides clear procedures for approaching the task of analysis. A central feature of these procedures is the use of a structured codebook using methods developed in qualitative research that included large datasets and several researchers conducting coding (MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, & Milstein, 1998).

There are a number of points of connection between ATA and the philosophical tradition of pragmatism as espoused by John Dewey. Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) argue that although the philosophical underpinnings of ATA lean towards positivism, there is nothing inherent within the approach that is at odds with interpretivism. This echoes the way in which Dewey sought to integrate and value both experimental science and human experience (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). The focus on practical solutions within pragmatism is another point of connection with ATA and further illustrates the congruency between this method of analysis and the theoretical perspective of this research study.

Braun & Clarke (2006) identify a number of common problems evident within published examples of thematic analysis. Firstly, the researcher may actually fail to undertake any analysis and simply provide a series of quotes from the data, strung together as if this were sufficient. Another pitfall is to use the questions themselves and report these as if they were the themes contained in the data. Where themes are identified these may be unconvincing because they are not coherent or distinct categories. Further problems can emerge if the themes are not sufficiently supported by the data extracts provided in the final report. The final problem identified by Braun and Clarke (2006) is that the reported findings may not clearly relate to the theory or questions identified at the outset of the research. I considered these risks in a reflective manner throughout the analysis process in this research. One particular challenge that I had to respond to was the tendency in the early analysis process to be restricted by the activity theory model and to use the questions, which were structured around activity

theory, as codes and themes. This was addressed by conducting a fresh inductive analysis process (see section 4.16), which explored the data for themes that extended beyond the theoretical model.

Descriptions of thematic analysis often suggest that themes simply 'emerge' from the data, implying a passive role for the researcher and an almost magical process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In fact, the researcher takes a very active role in identifying themes because it is their reading and interpretation of the data that lead to them being identified. Explanations of the actual procedures within thematic analysis vary across authors (for example see Braun & Clarke, 2006; Connolly, 2003; Guest et al., 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). However, each description also has a number of points of connection and these were identified to develop a specific set of procedures for data analysis in this research.

The first step in thematic analysis used in this current research was a *data familiarisation* process that involved reading and rereading the interview and focus group transcripts looking for patterns or comments related to the research questions that were stated particularly strongly or involved metaphors. A *code classification* process then followed, initially using theoretical concepts and then the data itself to generate codes and classify them in the codebook. Once the codes had been classified they were applied to the transcripts, taking careful note of the inclusion and exclusion criteria in this *code application* process. As codes were applied to the data they were closely examined to *identify themes.* This process generated numerous themes and so they were systematically examined to determine whether they were coherent and distinct. Themes were thereby reduced in number through a *theme interpretation* procedure that described what each theme included and excluded. The final two steps in the thematic analysis process involved theorisation by a process of identifying what the themes meant in relation to the original research questions and then *reporting* this analysis in ways that are clearly supported by examples in the data.

An example of this process can be illustrated from the codebook used in this research. Having read through the transcripts I noticed that several participants commented on their lack of contact with other field educators. For example, Anne said "there's not a lot of contact. So I just trundle along hoping I do my best". I coded this as an example of the experience of *solitariness*. I identified a number of other examples of solitariness, such as Rachel's comment that field educators "need to be there to support each other

because burn out rates are so high and I think that's sometimes because we are so isolated". In the same way, I also identified three related codes: *increasing solitariness, advice of field educators and guidance of field educators.* These three codes related to participant comments indicating an experience of increasing solitariness over time, and in contrast, experiences of receiving helpful advice or practical assistance from other field educators. I then examined all of the transcripts for further examples of these four codes. Once all the data had been coded, I reviewed the descriptions to identify areas of connection between the codes. I decided to group these four codes together under a sub-theme called *field educator guidance and support*. Following further consideration of the data within this sub-theme, I identified that participants' frequently described their work as an increasingly solitary role, and although there were examples of advice and guidance from their colleagues, this was a less common experience. This conclusion led me to develop the theme of *isolation* to capture the limited engagement of participants with a community of other field educators. This key theme became a central part of the analysis that I later discussed in the focus groups to identify ways to create a greater sense of membership to a professional learning community.

## 4.14 Computerised Coding

The process of qualitative data analysis requires careful management of considerable amounts of data; for example, numerous interview transcripts, and extensive coding, retrieval and notation. Computer software applications offer efficient handling of the sheer volume and complexity of these tasks (Gibbs, 2007). Computer software also allows for flexibility and responsiveness as the analysis develops, provides greater transparency of the analytic procedure and the efficient exploration of deviant cases (Lu & Shulman, 2008; Silver & Fielding, 2008). My research involved the management of a considerable amount of data related to the individual interviews and focus groups and an iterative process of coding and analysis that would have been challenging to complete without the use of computer software. Whilst some authors have proposed that decisions about qualitative data analysis software should be epistemologically driven, Marshall (2002) suggests that more practical choices are often evident based on what is available and recommended by colleagues. In this research, NVivo™ (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2012) was used to support the analysis process as this was a readily available tool that was fit for purpose. Although other software may have had additional features and utility, I only required coding and retrieval of written text

and so NVivo™ (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2012) provided all the features that were required, and many more beyond.

Using computer software within qualitative data analysis has been a topic of debate for more than 25 years (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2015) and a number of broad concerns can be identified in the literature. Firstly, early computer software made it difficult for researchers to jump from their coded transcripts back to the original data, which created an unhelpful distance between the data and the researcher, an issue addressed by the development of more refined software (Gibbs, 2007; Hahn, 2008). Software systems have also been criticised for being too aligned to one particular methodology, namely grounded theory, (Woods et al., 2015) although this association may be more related to independent researcher choice than imposition by the software (Tummons, 2014). A third concern, perhaps related to the rapid development of technology, is the possibility that computers might lead to the automation of the analysis process. However, the evidence of the development of software is that it provides quite modest support for researchers conducting analysis (Silver & Fielding, 2008). A further concern voiced is that there is a danger that researchers may develop research that includes analysis methods driven by the software rather than the objectives of the study (Woods et al., 2015). Finally, Lu and Shulman (2008) point out that software could subtly lead researchers into a quantification approach to coding and analysis rather than a focus on meaning. This concern is related less to the use of software and more to how the individual researcher applies it in their research. To counterbalance the danger of computer software influencing research results, researchers must be particularly careful to ensure they remain active in controlling how they use this powerful research tool (Lu & Shulman, 2008).

I viewed the use of computer software to support analysis in my research as an opportunity for increased reflexivity to respond to the risks associated with this decision (Woods, Macklin, & Lewis, 2015). I reflectively considered the concerns that I identified in the literature to ensure that the use of computer software was driven by the needs of the research rather than imposing restrictions on the analysis. NVivo™ (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2012) software was used because it does not prescribe a coding process, but rather supports the analysis process and allows flexibility to apply a variety of approaches. The coding process that I used in this research followed increasingly refined coding steps common to those proposed by Connolly (2003) and Hahn (2008). Step one begins with initial open coding in which the raw data is labelled.

In step two the initial codes are re-examined and code categories are developed to focus the data even further. In step three refined thematic codes are developed through a process of studying all of the early coding. In the final step, theoretical concepts may emerge from the careful consideration of all of the examples of categories and themes. This model can be applied to both deductive and inductive analysis, as I discuss below, and is a helpful framework for thinking about using computer software to achieve the objective of increasing refinement in coding levels and analysis. During the coding process, I followed this sequence of increasing refinement from one level to another, beginning with general coding and then refining these into more general themes and ultimately into theoretical ideas that were tested with field educators to ensure they represented a good fit with actual practice.

## 4.15 Deductive Coding

Coding can be conducted both deductively, using theory as a starting point, and inductively, using the data as a starting point (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). I used both these approaches in this research: the theoretical ideas that shaped the objectives and questions used in the interviews and focus groups provided the starting point for coding, and later the data was interrogated for naturally emerging codes. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 49) describe the merits of using literature and existing theory to sensitise the researcher as they conceptualise the analysis but recommend balance in also not allowing the literature to inhibit critical and creative thinking.

The process I followed in this research was similar to the theory-driven coding procedure described by Decuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch (2011, pp. 141–144). This involved three steps: code generation, code review and revision in context, and code reliability testing. Having completed an initial reading of each interview transcript, the process of developing a codebook began, initially using the conceptual models of activity theory as a guide for code development. This procedure involved defining codes on the basis of the triangular activity theory model (see Figure 3-1) (Engeström, 2001) and then testing these against the data and revising definitions as necessary. I individually coded each example of a specific node within the conceptual model and then grouped these into categories at increasingly higher levels of abstraction. I initially identified themes at this level when a participant came back to the same idea or concept on more than one occasion during the data collection process. I then examined the

remaining interviews within the dataset to see if this theme was identified by other participants.

MacQueen, McLellan, Kay and Milstein (1998) suggest that six definitional categories should be used in the development of a codebook; code mnemonic, brief definition, full definition, when to use, when not to use, example. Other researchers have adapted this structure to include only three components: code name, full definition and example. I decided to define each code and category in my codebook with six descriptors. NVivo™ (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2012) allows for a full *name* to be used for a code and so I did not require abbreviations. I then included an overall *description* of the code or category followed by *inclusion* and *exclusion* criteria. I then provided an *example* from the data to illustrate the application of the code. Finally, I included a description of the location in the *hierarchy* of the specific code and whether it aggregated a number of codes lower in the tree. I included this final descriptor because it helped me to track the relationship between the codes as the analysis of themes developed and I collapsed certain codes into larger categories. I maintained the codebook in an Excel spreadsheet to help me monitor development, but I also included the same definitional items within NVivo™ (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2012) for my reference whilst coding took place. An example from the codebook is provided in Table 4-2, showing the entry for code number 40 'Struggle with requirements' and then the relationship with the sub-theme 'Education rules and boundaries' and the theme 'Administrative structure'.

As I identified new codes during this initial analysis phase, I reviewed transcripts that had already been coded to check for the presence of new codes. I, therefore, developed the codebook in this iterative manner and identified and later collapsed codes into each other as the process of developing conceptual categories continued. Eventually, the codebook contained 109 individual codes, 26 sub-themes and seven primary themes.

One of the analysis tools utilised by Engeström (2000a) is the identification of conflicts within and between the nodes of an activity diagram that represent a particular work activity. This process is used by Engeström and colleagues to reveal possible opportunities for learning within the activity system and these are reflected back to research participants so that intervention strategies can be explored. I employed this process of conflict identification, as the initial coding developed, by posing three key

***Table 4-2: Sample from research codebook.***

| # | Name | Description | Include | Exclude | Example |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 40 | Struggle with Requirements | Examples of field educator struggling with academic institutions having requirements for certain activities | Requirements for activities at any part of the field education process | Field educator acceptance of requirements to be coded as 'Accepting Requirements' | Observation is good but I haven't used it in that structured way where I'm gonna sit back and observe. |

| # | Theme | # | Sub-theme | # | Codes Included | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | Administrative Structure<br><br>Examples of the rules and boundaries used by field educators as an administrative structure to answer the question of what can be done in field education | 10 | Education Rules and Boundaries<br><br>Examples of the influence of rules and boundaries from the academic institution | 40 | Struggle with Requirements | Examples of FE struggling with academic institutions having requirements for certain activities |
| | | | | 41 | Improve Field Educator Selection | Proposals for improving the way in which FE are selected |
| | | | | 42 | Variation in Requirements | Examples of the differences between the requirements of academic institutions |
| | | | | 51 | Accepting Requirements | Examples of the academic requirements directing FE practice |
| | | 11 | Agency Rules and Boundaries<br><br>Examples of the influence of rules and boundaries from the social service agency | 43 | Core Work | Examples of FE viewing their role as core work |
| | | | | 44 | HR Policies | Examples of HR policies being used to determine FE practice |
| | | | | 45 | HR Policy Problems | Examples of tension created for FE due to HR policy |

questions in relation to the data. Firstly, I considered whether the excerpt was an example of participants describing the presence of tension within a node of the work activity; for example, the community of practice. Secondly, I looked for examples of participants describing the presence of conflict between nodes within a work activity; for example, conflict between the rules of field education and the division of labour. Lastly, I examined transcripts for examples of participants describing the presence of conflict between different work activities: the activity of field education work and the activity of social service work, for example. In this way, I identified categories of tension or conflict and then amended the hierarchy of the codebook to reflect these themes.

A third example of deductive coding was used during the analysis of the focus groups. The two key objectives of the focus groups in phase two of this study can be summarised as responding to the conclusions identified in the initial analysis of the individual interviews and identifying professional responses to this analysis that field educators believed to be valid and useful in practice. In light of these objectives, I identified two areas of focus for structural coding. Firstly, I set out to identify any disagreement that field educators expressed about the theoretical ideas identified in the analysis of the individual interviews. Particular support for ideas was also of equal interest. Secondly, I sought to identify professional responses that field educators identified as being useful in practice. This included identifying ideas that were expressed frequently, or by multiple participants, or were expressed with particular intensity, or with examples from practice. Once again, although I used the objectives of the focus groups as a starting point for analysis, I then moved into a more inductive phase to ensure creative thinking was protected.

## 4.16 Inductive Coding

A second approach to coding is an inductive process that Decuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch (2011, pp. 141–144) call coding for content. I used this second approach to coding to ensure that the analysis was not limited by the use of activity theory. Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012, p. 65) suggest that the twelve analysis and processing techniques proposed by Ryan and Bernard (2003) may be useful in the process of coding for content. Ryan and Bernard suggest that these techniques should be used selectively on the basis of the objectives of the research, the skills of the researcher and the time available.

Having considered the restrictions on the feasibility of the analytical steps, I examined the transcripts line by line using techniques selected from the list proposed by Ryan and Bernard (2003). I examined the transcripts for repetitions to identify recurring patterns or ideas. The use of key words was another source of themes. I also identified unique language or ways of discussing field education, along with instances when participants used a metaphor or image to describe their experience. I also examined the similarities and differences between participants' answers to identify the points of departure in the way respondents answered each of the questions. Finally, I examined the transcripts for examples of missing data to identify what was not being talked about that could reasonably be expected. I identified codes through these techniques and then grouped them together into categories or themes. Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) make the point that there is a danger in indulging the temptation to interpret beyond what is actually supported in the transcription text. I, therefore, took care to use interpretation judiciously and ensure that any codes or themes were actually evidenced by multiple respondents.

It became clear during the analysis of the interviews that although activity theory was initially a useful tool, it had started to hinder further analysis because it was psychologically difficult for me to break out of the confines of the model. Therefore, I took the decision to expand the horizon of the analysis and revisit the data to try and identify higher-level themes. I, therefore, examined the first order coding categories to identify further themes or connections between the data. This proved a useful approach and I identified three different professional systems as being evident in the data. This analysis led me to identify additional coding categories related to the systems of social service work, education institution work and field education work. I scrutinised the data by repeated re-reading and then applied new themes within NVivo™ (QSR International Pty Ltd. Version 10, 2012). In this process of analysis, I sought to identify latent or implied themes rather than just what had been explicitly stated. Participants did not necessarily articulate a category or theme in the way I have presented it in the findings, but rather their words suggested an underlying issue, idea or concept. This approach is consistent with a constructionist epistemology and helped me to identify structures and meaning that the theoretical framework suggested might be present.

## 4.17 Evaluating Research Quality

Evaluating the quality of research and selecting criteria for this assessment have been topics of academic debate for several decades, particularly since the proliferation of qualitative methodologies and more recently mixed methods research designs. Whilst there is considerable agreement about the use of concepts such as validity and reliability, or about techniques for testing these criteria in quantitative research (Williams & Morrow, 2009), these realist concepts may only be appropriate in the most general sense for qualitative research and alternative concepts may be necessary (Noble & Smith, 2015). However, whilst qualitative researchers may question the presence of a single external reality against which to check the validity of knowledge claims, most would acknowledge the possibility of error in research findings or that researchers can be biased (Gibbs, 2007). The concept of trustworthiness is used by qualitative researchers to refer to a range of concepts associated with quality and validity, some specific to particular paradigms and others more universal (Morrow, 2005). The challenge comes when trying to select a set of criteria to evaluate the trustworthiness of qualitative research from the many lists that have been proposed (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Lincoln and Guba's (1985) seminal work on techniques for evaluating research quality, attempts to map the connections between criteria used within quantitative and qualitative traditions, and their concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are often quoted in the qualitative research literature. However, Bryman, Becker and Sempik (2008) found that although social policy researchers generally agreed about the use of credibility and confirmability as concepts for evaluating qualitative studies, far less agreement was evident in relation to transferability and dependability. Reflexivity, characterised by an acknowledgement that the researcher is in the world they are investigating and that they embody values from their context (Gibbs, 2007), is another concept, along with transparency, often identified as a marker for quality in qualitative inquiry (Bryman et al., 2008).

In an attempt to navigate the maze of validity concepts presented in the literature, Whittemore, Chase and Mandle (2001) have proposed a model that uses primary and secondary evaluation criteria. Primary criteria are intended to be a relatively stable list of concepts that can be widely used by qualitative researchers. In contrast, secondary criteria are more flexible and need to be applied dependent on specific methodologies. The model integrates quality concepts from across the literature and a total of ten are included. There are four primary criteria in the two-tier model; credibility, authenticity,

criticality and integrity. *Credibility* involves a consideration of whether the descriptions provided in the analysis reflect experiences in ways that are trustworthy and believable to participants. Ensuring that the research findings reflect the nuances of a variety of experience and different voices demonstrates *authenticity*. The research design must be systematic and alternative designs should be explored in critical ways to show *criticality*. The researcher must also demonstrate that the findings are grounded in the data and that regular quality checks have been undertaken to show *integrity*. The six secondary criteria - explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence and sensitivity - should be applied and emphasised within any research in accordance with the methodological framework. Research informed by critical theory might emphasise the secondary criteria of explicitness, vividness and sensitivity whereas phenomenological studies might emphasise explicitness, vividness and thoroughness (Whittemore et al., 2001). The paradigm used by the researcher shapes decisions about how to demonstrate trustworthiness (Williams & Morrow, 2009) and therefore a selection of secondary quality criteria must be made based on the perspective of the study.

In their discussion of quality standards for the outcome of research analysis, Miles and Huberman (1994) deftly sidestep the debates about different quality concepts by using both traditional and alternative terms used across the literature. Interestingly, the last of their criteria concerns the degree to which the findings are useful for application and action in practice, a concept that Loh (2013) describes as utility and Morrow (2005) as social validity. This focus on the pragmatic value of research conclusions appears to be missing in the two-tier model presented by Whittemore, Chase and Mandle (2001) but was a significant concern for me in this current research. The concept of utility might therefore be considered an additional secondary criterion that is particularly important when using pragmatism as a theoretical perspective.

I adopted the four primary quality criteria in the two-tier model presented by Whittemore, Chase and Mandle (2001) as the foundation for evaluating my research. I have emphasised utility as a secondary criterion, in line with the pragmatist theoretical perspective informing the study. As I explained in the previous chapter, my research is informed by a critical version of pragmatism and so I have also emphasised the secondary quality criteria of sensitivity, explicitness and vividness. As a consequence of adopting a critical approach, I also felt it was important to ensure that multiple voices were evident in the study (sensitivity) to avoid emphasising a dominant discourse from

a single powerful group. Furthermore, I have provided a detailed description of the methods I have used (explicitness) because the issue of investigator bias is also important from a critical perspective. Lastly, I have attempted to provide rich and faithful descriptions (vividness) of the data given by participants. This selection of secondary criteria is not to suggest that the other aspects of quality were not important and I reflectively considered these throughout the research. However, I provide below specific examples of the actual steps taken to address the aspects of trustworthiness particularly relevant to the theoretical perspective of this research.

## 4.18 Quality Steps

Alongside discussions about the criteria that should be used to evaluate the trustworthiness of qualitative research, a variety of techniques have been proposed in the literature to demonstrate that these standards have been met (Noble & Smith, 2015). Williams and Morrow (2009) have argued that there are many shared goals and techniques for establishing trustworthiness across the qualitative research continuum although differences in processes do exist. However, the array of methods to assure quality can make it challenging to choose specific procedures; Creswell and Miller (2000) therefore recommend selection on the basis of two perspectives on quality. The first perspective is the lens through which the researcher evaluates their study; their own, the study participants, or external evaluators. The second consideration is the philosophical perspective that informs the research. The nine procedures included in Creswell and Miller's (2000) model are not unique and are also identified by a range of other authors (e.g. Shenton, 2004). Indeed, Miles and Huberman (1994) provide much longer lists of suggestions for the practical steps researchers can take to ensure the quality of conclusions. What Creswell and Miller's (2000) model offers, therefore, is not a prescription for which procedures to use and which to exclude, but rather a helpful way to think about which techniques might be more important in any particular study. Researchers must make individual choices about the steps they will take to enhance confidence in the conclusions they draw, bearing in mind the dimensions of quality already discussed.

The procedures I selected to strengthen the trustworthiness of my study address the three lenses identified by Creswell and Miller (2000): researcher, participant and reader. I have employed quality techniques that fit within a constructionist paradigm but also sought to ensure a critical and systematic approach to the study. I have therefore elected

to use a range of approaches to address the dimensions of quality and trustworthiness discussed earlier, whilst emphasising those that connect to the epistemological and theoretical perspective of the research.

I have addressed the four primary quality criteria (Creswell and Miller, 2000) through the techniques of prolonged engagement in the field, examination of dis-confirming evidence and the use of detailed description, which all connect to constructionist concerns. However, I have further sought to strengthen the *credibility* of the research through the more critical approach of collaborating with field educators during the focus groups, to examine the analysis from the individual interviews and jointly shape the final conclusions of the study. I have addressed *authenticity* through the process of examining dis-confirming evidence during the focus groups and extended this further by adopting a critically reflexive approach that involved an examination of bias and influence. I have used a reflective approach to increase the *criticality* of the study, which involved changes to the design during the research, utilising focused journaling during the examination of data and a systematic approach to coding and analysis. I have addressed the *integrity* of the analysis by connecting it to detailed descriptions and quotes from participants. The peer debriefing that took place with my doctorate supervisors also strengthens the integrity of the research from a critical perspective.

I have also addressed the four secondary quality criteria (Creswell and Miller, 2000) through the use of the same techniques. Collaboration with field educators during the focus groups has ensured that the conclusions of the study have *utility* and practical application in the field education context. This collaboration also strengthened the *sensitivity* of the research and ensured that a variety of field educator experiences are reflected in the findings. A critically reflexive approach also addressed issues of *explicitness*, particularly in relation to researcher bias and influence. The use of detailed descriptions, quotes and debriefing with supervisors also helps to increase the *vividness* of the description of the world of field education.

### 4.18.1 Reflexivity and Collaboration

The use of reflexivity is an important method for establishing trustworthiness in social work research (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006). Reflexivity involves continuous awareness of how one's own self is influencing the research, and critically analysing personal assumptions about objectivity (D'Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez, 2006). This

requires more than simply reflecting on research activities after the event, and depends upon an ongoing process of critical reflectivity (Kondrat, 1999). Reflexivity involves the careful examination of the potential sources of bias, be they social, cultural or historical (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The explicit sharing of personal information and acknowledgement of influences on the data collection and analysis processes is a necessary part of a critical approach to research (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In my own case, I began this research having worked as a social worker and manager in clinical settings for many years. I had been involved in working with students in practice settings and had therefore developed views about the role of field educators from the perspective of a practitioner and a manager. Immediately prior to starting the research, I managed the professional association for social workers in Aotearoa and therefore had a clear interest in the quality of social work education and student placements. My work with the professional association involved a project looking at the future of social work education and this project highlighted some of the particular challenges surrounding the quality and quantity of student placements. By the time I started the research, I had also transitioned into a tertiary education environment that required me to develop new knowledge and skills to be an effective educator. Furthermore, my role as a field education co-ordinator involved recruiting social workers to offer student placements and the development of the assessment tools they would then use to participate in the assessment process.

In one sense, therefore, I embarked on this research as an insider, already having a strong idea about some of the challenges facing field educators. The research was also conducted over a six-year period, during which time my professional work deepened my understanding of the challenge facing field educators. This privileged position meant that I had access to and credibility with the people that I wanted to include in my investigation. However, at the same time, I represented one of the powerful actors in the social context of field education. Many of the research participants knew me in my role as a field education co-ordinator, and to them, I represented the process for monitoring the quality of their work with students. My role also necessitated a focus on an educational frame of reference. This meant that I started out wanting to examine the extent to which pedagogy was influencing field education practice. All of these factors highlight the personal bias that undoubtedly influenced my thinking whilst undertaking this research. However, by critically reflecting on the factors that influenced my thinking to moderate my own bias, I hoped to minimise the impact of any personal

views in the research findings. I was also explicit with participants about my role and the processes in place to ensure the information they shared did not negatively impact their professional work. These processes are consistent with social work practice and therefore the knowledge, values and skills I had developed over many years were crucial in this critical approach to my role and practice as a researcher.

The openness and honesty that I showed towards participants was intended to reflect the type of relationship that I was trying to develop. Whilst acknowledging the potential power dynamic, I sought to establish a partnership approach whereby the research would give voice to field educators and reflect their ideas about how field education practice could be developed. Seidman (2013) argues that even the terminology used to refer to the person being interviewed suggests something about their relationship to the researcher. In this thesis, I have chosen to refer to the person being interviewed as a participant, rather than a subject or an interviewee. The conscious use of this term reflects the fact that in this study field educators were asked to reconstruct their experience during individual and group interviews having also actively participated in the research process by contributing to the analysis through the focus group discussions. The aim of my research was not to simply reflect the lived experience of field educators but also to engage them in a process of considering how to develop practice to address some of the challenges they have experienced.

### 4.18.2 Triangulation and Dis-confirming Evidence

As has already been noted, Merton (1987) identified the value of utilising more than one method of data collection when using focussed interviews. This process allows for triangulation in that results from different methods can be integrated. This was one of the reasons for including both individual interviews and focus groups in the design of this research and was intended to enhance the authenticity of the findings. However, triangulation can present researchers with a challenge when deciding what to do with any contradictions that emerge and whether these should be seen as a reducing confidence in the results or offering greater insight into complexity (Barbour, 2007). Undertaking focus groups in this study provided an opportunity for data to be produced that dis-confirmed, or called into question the conclusions drawn from the initial analysis. However, I did not make the choice to use two data collection phases in the hope that the two methods would produce entirely synergistic results, but rather so that the influences on the practice of field educators could be examined from different

perspectives, resulting in rich multi-faceted descriptions. The main contradiction to arise in the analysis was that some participants in the focus groups commented that the points suggested in the initial analysis did not match their experience. For example, some said that they had experienced no significant conflict with their manager or social work colleagues in relation to their field education work. In the second focus group, there was a discussion about teaching practice being driven by the assessment document rather than a pedagogical framework and Nigel[17] said that he did not think this was something to be concerned about despite this being identified as a concern in the initial analysis.

> *I don't necessarily think that's problematic, that that's the way it happens. I think it's just maybe as good as it gets (Nigel, Focus Group 2 Participant).*

Although there were a number of examples of these contradictions, in general, the focus group participants confirmed the findings from the individual interviews. Therefore, the points of difference were taken to be reminders of the variety of field educator experience and the importance of avoiding generalisations. These comments emphasised the complexity of the contextual influences on field educator practice and this was incorporated into the later analysis and model development. In this way, the intentional incorporation of multiple voices enriched the analysis and helped to strengthen confidence in the conclusions of the study.

A second reason for using focus groups was to provide an opportunity for participants to examine the initial analysis of the individual interviews. Participant checking is often undertaken by providing copies of the interview transcriptions so that these can be validated by interviewees. However, within a constructionist paradigm, interviews are not seen as a mirror reflecting one single reality but are a snap shot of a complex and evolving world. A number of difficulties exist with participant checking, including perceptions of researcher power or bias, the complexity of the analysis or the challenge of incorporating feedback (Kornbluh, 2015). Participants may also change their views following an interview, or misremember their responses, or be pressured into changing their statements (Gibbs, 2007). Therefore, it may be of little value to ask participants to validate transcripts, but far more helpful to ask them to comment on the conclusions that

[17] Names of participants have been replaced with randomly allocated pseudonyms throughout this thesis.

have been drawn from the interviews as a whole. The focus groups facilitated this opportunity and also provided participants with a way to indicate whether the analysis was credible. Participants were able to hear one another's comments and to offer additional insights to enrich the developing analysis. In this sense, the focus groups process allowed for a degree of collaboration between participants and myself and between participants. The final analysis is not one that has been completed in a manner divorced from field educators, but rather they have played an important role in shaping the conclusions and proposals for further action.

### 4.18.3 Detailed Description and Peer Debriefing

The approach to reporting the construction, challenges, choices, changes and conclusions of this research endeavour has been designed to clearly describe the critical thinking that was involved in each step of the research process. Whilst the nature of providing such a detailed description tends to suggest a neat linear process, this was not the case. The research process was an iterative one that necessitated changes in direction. For example, the initial research proposal was for a mixed methods design that utilised individual interviews and a national survey. It became clear that this design was inconsistent with the theoretical perspective that had come to inform the research, and following reflection and discussion with my supervisors the research design was revised and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee (Appendix A). Although the report I have provided in this thesis appears more linear than the process was in reality, the description is designed to facilitate an audit process so that it is clear how the conclusions were drawn and the various influences that played a part. Throughout the research journey, I was also supported by my supervisors who questioned the decisions that were being made, offered alternative avenues to pursue and challenged me to undertake a comprehensive inquiry. This peer evaluation and debriefing process was also invaluable in providing critical feedback on whether the descriptions of the interview and focus group data were provided in enough detail and clarity to ensure understanding by those who were not actually present. At the end of the day, the success of these quality procedures will only be tested by the evaluation of people external to the research.

## 4.19 Research Ethics

The concern for ethical research practice is a response to historical examples of inquiry that failed to respect the needs of human subjects (Loue, 2002). As a member of ANZASW, I am required by the Code of Ethics (ANZASW, 2015) to undertake research in an ethical manner that maintains the dignity and wellbeing of participants. Six ethical principles are normally identified as the basic for ethical research: autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, fidelity and veracity (Hays & Singh, 2012). Although a number of different approaches to resolving ethical dilemmas exist, a pragmatist understands these conflicting systems as responding to changes in social conditions over time and would argue for a careful consideration of values to maintain the integrity of those involved in the process of inquiry (Loue, 2002). I have therefore sought to incorporate some of the values of social work, namely self-determination, respect, confidentiality, equality, social justice and partnership (Thompson, 2005) into an approach to addressing the ethical concerns of this present research. The ethical issues that I, therefore, identified in this study were informed consent, potential breaches of privacy, unintended negative impacts on participant's work as field educators, the likely benefits of participation and bicultural considerations. Having considered these issues, the research was approved by the Human Ethics Committee and the Ngāi Tahu Consultation and Engagement Group (Appendix A) at the University of Canterbury.

### 4.19.1 Informed consent

Informed consent might be described as a cornerstone of ethical research (Hays & Singh, 2012), although Burgess (2007) has pointed out the different degrees of risk associated with medical and social research and suggested that alternative methods for ensuring informed and voluntary participation in social research may be appropriate. Tolich (2009) has also pointed out that it is extremely difficult to provide full disclosure prior to participation in a focus group because the researcher cannot control all of the issues that may be raised during the discussion. The limitations of informed consent must, therefore, be acknowledged whilst attempting to maintain respect and self-determination for participants. In my research, an invitation was sent to field educators by UC and Ara to participate in either an individual interview or focus groups and an information sheet (Appendices 10.7 & 10.10) was provided that included full details of the nature of the study. This same process was followed with the two participants I

approached directly when recruiting for the individual interviews. The information sheet was also reviewed in person immediately prior to the interview or focus group and participants signed a consent form (Appendices 10.8 & 10.12). I informed field educators of their right to withdraw any information they provided prior to completion of the final analysis of the data and this was emphasised at the end of the focus groups because of the potential that the discussion had in some way impacted on their willingness to participate.

### 4.19.2 Privacy

Confidentiality is linked to informed consent and is legally seen as a right that must be upheld in research (Hays & Singh, 2012). In this study, I applied the principles of the Privacy Act (Privacy Act, 1993) to all aspects of information collection, storage and use. This included collecting only that data which could be legitimately used for this research and only from participants who had given their informed consent for the duration of the study. Personal contact details were required to make arrangements for the interviews and focus groups but this information was not disclosed to others without the consent of the practitioners, and I have removed all identifying details and used research identified pseudonyms within the thesis. However, there can be situations where participants may be identified through the detailed descriptions provided in a research report despite the use of pseudonyms and Kaiser (2009) suggests that this potential should be discussed with participants. In focus group research this problem is exacerbated because participants may already know each other and the researcher cannot ensure all group members will respect privacy and confidentiality (Tolich, 2009). I made participants aware of the potential limitations of confidentiality and the importance of respecting privacy at the start of the focus groups. These issues are familiar to social workers and it should be possible to expect a high degree of respect for these principles from this particular community.

### 4.19.3 Potential Disadvantage

A further aspect of informed consent is the obligation on researchers to anticipate the potential for adverse consequences for participants from participating in research, including psychological, relational and professional implications (Oliver, 2010). In the present study the topic of exploration was unlikely to raise negative emotional content for participants beyond memories of their own placements as a student. However, there

was the potential for a perceived impact on the practitioners' work as a field educator. It is possible that some participants would have been concerned that I may be assessing their suitability or competence as a field educator because of my role as a field education co-ordinator within one of the local academic institutions. Whilst this may never have been my intent it was important to explicitly address this issue in the information sheets and briefings I gave prior to the interviews and focus groups.

### 4.19.4 Likely Benefits

In contrast to a concern about the potential disadvantages to research participants, it is also important to consider the possible benefits from participation (Oliver, 2010). My research has been informed by pragmatism and I have therefore placed a high value on the practical application of the findings (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Field educators were involved in discussions about the initial analysis of the interviews during the focus groups and also contributed ideas about the things that might be changed in field education to respond to the findings. This process allowed for a sense of partnership and for practitioners to become involved in the process of introducing changes in practice. Whilst I am unable to control whether any of the recommendations will actually be introduced, the collaboration with field educators opened up the possibility for them to make changes themselves.

### 4.19.5 Bicultural Issues

The principle of partnership is an important aspect of bicultural practice that I also considered in this research. I set out to include participation from Māori field educators and so it was important to consider whether the process and content of the interviews and focus groups would be culturally appropriate and take account of the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. I specifically incorporated time at the beginning of the interview for establishing personal connection and to clarify language and terminology. I also crafted questions that would not indicate assumptions or preferences about how to conduct field education. Prior to recruiting participants for the interviews I discussed the questions with a Māori colleague and undertook an interview with a Māori field educator. This process did not raise any significant concerns and so I went ahead with the recruitment but later had to specifically approach a Māori field educator because none volunteered to participate. Following this experience, I adopted a more personal

approach with the focus groups in recognition of the fact that some Māori follow traditional values and appreciate a personal face-to-face invitation rather than email.

## 4.20 Limitations

Whilst every attempt has been made to ensure the quality, trustworthiness and adequacy of this research, a number of limitations are evident. The first of these is inherent within exploratory qualitative research designs. Whilst previous research has explored the factors that impact on a student's experience of field education, there has been limited research into the factors impacting field educator practice. For this reason, an exploratory design was appropriate and I have chosen to focus on the social work field educator population in one relatively small community in Aotearoa. The nature of this design means that the findings cannot necessarily be generalised to other geographical locations or other professional disciplines. I have provided detailed descriptions of the design of this study so that it is possible to determine what aspects of the findings might be applicable in other contexts and which might require further research.

Certain characteristics of the participant population also present limitations for the research, a characteristic of recruiting a small and relatively homogeneous sample. Whilst a range of types and size of organisations are represented in the research, it has not been feasible to include participants from every type of social service agency or team. It is possible that there are organisations that provide quite different levels of support to their social work field educators and the findings in this study will not represent their experience. In a similar way, not all field educator experience is represented because of an uneven distribution of the age, gender or expertise of participants. This is particularly true of Māori field educators or those from other ethnic groups. Whilst the research does include a range of demographics, it is possible that some quite different experiences are not represented and therefore potential factors influencing practice may not have been identified.

Due to the individual nature of doctoral-level study and the practicalities of conducting interviews and focus groups alone, the research is also vulnerable to influence from the opinions I held about field education prior to starting the research and the theoretical bias that I brought to the inquiry. Collaboration with other researchers would have been helpful and may have exposed other avenues for analysis. However, I have made

explicit my bias and adopted a reflexive approach to minimise the impact of these issues.

Research informed by pragmatism and activity theory is concerned with the practical implication for real work situations of the expanded area of knowledge. This emphasis is evident in my study, particularly in the discussions with field educators about what might be changed in field education practice to respond to the issues identified during the interviews. However, it is beyond the scope of this research to test the real-world application of the ideas that participants proposed. Whilst the views of field educators about what would work are valuable, the true test will be changes in work practises. Further research in other settings and in other disciplines is, therefore, necessary to build on my findings in this study.

## 4.21 Summary of research design

In this chapter I have described the research design and methods I used to address the objectives of my inquiry. I have explained how the chosen methods of responsive interviewing and focus groups connect to the epistemological and theoretical influences of the research. I have also thoroughly outlined my systematic approach to analysis, using both deductive and inductive processes. A central reason for describing these methods in this level of detail is to provide an audit trail so that the process can be replicated by other researchers and ultimately to increase the trustworthiness of the findings. Although there are limitations inherent within an exploratory qualitative research design, I hope that the transparent and open approach I have adopted will ultimately increase the usefulness of the findings for the field education community. In the following chapters, I report the findings, discuss the implications for practice and explore some recommendations for the field education community and the need for further research.

# 5 Expansive Learning

In this chapter, I discuss the findings from an analysis of the individual interviews through the lens of activity theory, with a particular focus on identifying the potential for expansive learning and transformation indicated by the tensions within the field education activity system. I will also provide examples from the focus groups that relate to this analysis, as a form of triangulation. The first data collection phase in this research involved 20 interviews with social workers who had worked as field educators. The objective of these interviews was to hear directly from practitioners about the factors that influenced their work. I could have begun by focusing solely on the findings from previous literature to generate the questions for participants or used ideas based on my own experience as a field education co-ordinator. Alternatively, I could have started with a blank canvas and simply asked field educators to identify the factors that influenced their practice. However, I was concerned that taking either of these approaches could result in some important areas being relatively unexplored, either because previous research had not investigated certain factors impacting field education, or because field educators had not recognised certain influences on their work. I, therefore, decided to use a theoretical model to help map out the territory that I would potentially need to explore with participants, with the intention of expanding my field of vision. I selected activity theory for this purpose because it provided a map, or framework, for thinking about the different dimensions of field education as a collective goal-oriented activity. Yamagata-Lynch (2003) suggests that although interviews in research informed by activity theory can help to enter into the experience of individuals, they are used with the objective of analysing the activity system as a whole. Therefore,

activity theory supported a broad perspective on field education, although it also created boundaries that I had to overcome, in particular, to incorporate cultural considerations.

The unit of analysis that I adopted for this phase of the research was the activity of field education as a complex system involving multiple actors and interrelated actions. Engeström (2000b) identifies two levels of analysis in activity theory, goal-directed actions and object-oriented activity. Goal-directed actions are undertaken by individuals and subject to frequent change, but they form part of a more stable and collective object-oriented activity. Field education involves a series of goal-directed actions undertaken by individual field educators: interviewing a prospective student, conducting a supervision session, or completing an assessment form. Whilst these actions are important windows into the activity, it is the object-oriented activity of field education that is the primary focus of this analysis. The goal-directed actions of field educators principally have meaning in the broader context of the activity system that they are subsumed within.

The primary analysis method I used in this phase of the research was to identify the contradictions and tensions within the field education activity system. Yamagata-Lynch and Haudenschild (2009) suggest that the identification of contradictions and tensions is one of the primary contributions that activity theory offers to researchers investigating complex human interaction. Engeström (1987) identified four different levels of contradictions either within activity systems or between different systems. Primary contradictions exist when competing values impact on the work of practitioners. An example in field education might be the value placed on comprehensive training programmes for field educators. However, field educators also value time efficient training due to the busyness of their role and so may be disinclined to engage in long professional development programmes. Secondary contradictions occur when practitioners encounter new aspects of an activity that create conflict when they attempt to incorporate these actions into their work (Yamagata-Lynch, 2003). For example, field education might be considered an extension of the activity of social work practice that experienced practitioners engage in. However, field educators have reported that they are often required to take on this work in addition to their normal responsibilities (Maidment, 2000b,), creating a tension when trying to implement the new rules and division of labour. Tertiary level contradictions are created when external activity systems impose new ways of working on subjects that then conflict with the historical ways of doing things. An example within field education might be the imposition of

rules by the SWRB stating that only Registered Social Workers can provide student placements. This rule may disrupt the usual division of labour and exclude some practitioners from engaging in their role as a field educator. The fourth level of contradiction occurs when changes in adjacent activity systems result in practitioners having to make changes to their normal approaches to the work. For example, the restructuring of a social work team involving the adoption of new rules about ways of working with clients may impact on the learning opportunities that are available for students, making it necessary for field educators to make changes in their approach to teaching students. The identification of these different types of contradictions is intended to assist researchers in recognising the tensions within activity systems that might encourage development, inhibit development or act as a catalyst for the reconstruction of an activity (Engeström, 1993).

I identified evidence in the interview data of contradictions within the activity of field education through thematic analysis. I examined examples of each of the four levels of contradictions to identify the potential for change and transformation in how field education is conducted. The nature of an exploratory piece of research into the complex human interactions involved in field education means that the analysis process and communication of findings is complicated (Yamagata-Lynch, 2003). Using the diagrammatic tools from activity theory assists this process, but can never reflect fully the nuanced complexity of real-world interactions (Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009). The use of visual tools from activity theory in this chapter should therefore not be taken to imply that it is possible to represent the experience of every field educator in this manner, but rather that it provides a method for analysing complexity and communicating findings in a manageable way.

I identified four areas of contradiction following analysis of the individual interviews. The first tension concerned the object of field education and whether this was focused on professional responsibility, workforce needs, or protected learning. Secondly, participants reported variable levels of assistance from their team colleagues, managers and academic staff, indicating a tension between the division of labour and community involved in field education. Rules and boundaries were the third area of contradiction identified in the interviews. Participants reported using the policies and procedures of the social services team and the academic institution, but field educators were faced with managing conflict when these different sets of rules did not translate well into individual practice contexts. The final area of tension related to the methods and tools

that field educators employed during the teaching and learning interaction. Participants described an apprenticeship-based approach, influenced by the practice context, and an assessment focused model, influenced by the academic institution. In the face of these competing models, practitioners developed creative ways of working through a process of trial and error.

## 5.1 Motivation and Objectives

My analysis of the individual interviews undertaken in this research revealed a tension between three competing ideas about the object of field education. Within activity theory, the object of an activity system can be thought of as the goal or motive (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Whilst there were a number of ways that participants expressed the object of field education, there appeared to be three dominant ideas. Analysis of the interviews indicated that participants felt a professional responsibility to provide a learning context for future practitioners, and also recognised the professional development they gained from the process. In contrast, the practice setting appeared to place significant value on how field education could provide a source of students to bolster the workforce, whilst the education context valued placements as learning experiences. Although these objectives may not be mutually exclusive, there appeared to be a tension that participants managed as they responded to the variety of expectations. Interestingly, the data obtained in this study suggests that field educators were engaged individually, rather than collectively, in finding ways to address these competing ideas about the object of field education.

Ideas of professionalism appeared to be an important motivator for participants and were often related to their own experience as a student. The memory of their own placement experience was evidently very powerful for participants, even many years after graduation. Several practitioners noted their desire to provide the same kind of experiences as they benefited from. Claire described the significant impact that her social work education had on shaping her as a person and the strong connection she then felt with the staff from that programme.

> *When people ask me what shaped your life, I talk about two places, [placement agency] and [education institution] as being the two key shapers of me figuring out who I am and how I want to live my life. So, I have a huge sense of connectedness to [education institution] and that, and*

> *a real love of the teaching staff there in the way that I was taught and cared for. So, that was a key motivator for me wanting to take students" (Claire, Individual Interview Participant).*

Although Claire possibly described this sentiment in the strongest terms, she was not alone in identifying an emotional connection and sense of responsibility to a particular education programme. Several field educators clearly identified a sense of responsibility to pay back what was invested in them when they were completing their training. For some participants, this sense of debt appeared to be linked to the education institution where they completed their qualification, but for others, it was linked more broadly to the profession as a whole. Simeon went so far as to quantify this as a responsibility for all social workers to provide at least two placements. Although other participants did not mention this accounting idea, several did mention their sense of a professional responsibility to provide placements. This motivator is consistent with Maidment's (2000b) findings with social workers, and is also consistent with the views of occupational therapists (Thomas et al., 2007), physiotherapists (Öhman et al., 2005) and dietitians (Hasseberg, 2003) about their professional responsibilities.

It would perhaps be reasonable to assume that field educators would feel a greater sense of debt following positive placement experiences. However, even in situations where practitioners had negative memories, these were often translated into positive energy to ensure future students did not have the same experiences. Some participants described poor practice or bullying behaviour from their field educator, whilst others described being given tasks that provided very limited opportunity for appropriate learning. Despite these challenges, field educators explained that they had a desire to provide placements that protected students from negative experiences and that created worthwhile learning. Regardless of the quality of their own experience, participants appeared to have a sense of professional responsibility to provide field education.

The connection to professionalism went beyond the concept of responsibility. Participants also identified that working as a field educator benefited their professional development. For example, Anne suggested that working with students was a form of professional learning and that discussions with students reminded her of the ethical dimensions of her work.

> *It keeps me fresh, it keeps me on my toes, and I like that, and I like to keep professional. And just talking about ethics and moral dilemmas – it highlights for me too, as I'm talking with the student, boundary issues. So it's a refresher course for me as well when I have students. And it's learning for me, as well, so I do get all that out of it (Anne, Individual Interview Participant).*

Claire and Emma also suggested that field education provides a professional challenge to keep abreast of developments in social work theory. Kelly described this as "reciprocity" and said that she valued the "debating and discussing and talking" (Kelly, Individual Interview Participant). Other participants said that they appreciated the learning they gained from working with students and found this to be refreshing and enriching as a professional. In the third focus group, Rebekah even said she felt selfish because she recognised that she benefited from providing placements, particularly because students had access to the most current learning and so could teach her certain things. Participants in the fourth focus group also confirmed the benefits to their professional development that accrued through working with students.

The professional development benefits of working with students has been noted in previous social work research in Aotearoa (Maidment, 2000b) and internationally (Develin & Mathews, 2008; Shardlow et al., 2002). This is often expressed as professional stimulation and is also connected to an interest in contributing to the development of others (Develin & Mathews, 2008). Similar motivations have been noted for nursing field educators (Rebholz, 2013), teachers (Trevethan, 2013), physiotherapists (Öhman et al., 2005) and occupational therapists (Thomas et al., 2007). McAllister (2001) argues that the commitment to continuous professional development that is a marker of professionalism is also a core attribute of motivated field educators. My study reinforces the findings from this earlier research and indicates that professionalism is an important motivator for field educators.

Alongside a commitment to professionalism, field educators also articulated the idea that a key objective of field education was to respond to workforce needs in the agency. This finding is consistent with research undertaken in America (Jarman-Rohde et al., 1997) and Aotearoa (Maidment, 2000b) that found that students can be seen as a resource to support a team's work. Participants in the current study made reference to the idea that students helped to increase the capacity of the team to respond to

immediate workload pressures. For example, Luke said that he had arranged to have a student on placement in a small non-government organisation because it doubled the work output of the team, free of charge. Sarah made a similar comment from the perspective of a large statutory agency.

> *I guess there's also the want to have the volume of students to assist with co-working within the office – we're busy, there's no denying that, and so having capable students who can come out and do your note taking, takes the pressure off, from an agency perspective, about why they're driven to have students (Sarah, Individual Interview Participant).*

This pressure to help respond to workload demands appeared to result in field educators identifying ways for students to be productive team members. Participants talked about student tasks, such as completing case notes or writing up assessments, as reducing the pressure on staff. Practitioners also mentioned how students were treated as inexperienced staff and therefore were not involved in high-risk work. However, several field educators said that if there was an urgent need for assistance then a student might be expected to step in and help, in a similar way to how new members of staff might be used. This appeared to lead to experiences of conflict in teams, with field educators trying to protect students from being asked to participate in work beyond their level of competence. For some participants, the challenge of managing the expectation that students should be productive colleagues led to a cost-benefit analysis. Chris suggested that practitioners calculated whether they would get sufficient return on their investment in students and sometimes, on balance, decided to withdraw from field education and focus on the demands of their normal social work practice. Robert also described a process of calculating how much time he had given to students compared to how much independent work they had given back, again suggesting a concern about productivity.

I raised this analysis with the focus groups to triangulate the findings and so participants discussed the issue of students being viewed as a staffing resource. In the first focus group, participants suggested that this was a historical perspective but that employers were now more aware of the risk of asking a student to undertake work as if they were staff. Participants in other groups were also keen to make it clear that they did not treat students as staff even though they acknowledged this was an organisational attitude in the past. In contrast, during the third focus group, Kate was quite clear that students were seen as an additional pair of hands. This variety of experiences was related to the

difference between statutory and non-government agencies by participants in the fourth focus group. Similar differences in organisational attitudes to students have been noted in research in the UK (Torry et al., 2005). The role of field educators in managing the various attitudes towards students was particularly highlighted by Joanne in the final focus group. She talked about presenting a proposal for a student placement that was based on the idea of their potential work output, but then protecting the student from this attitude once the placement was approved by her manager.

> *I have used the term "free social work labourer" in an effort to convince my employer that the opportunity [of a student placement] was a good one. But once the social work student is there then I go about the second phase which is protecting that space and trying not to let them get used for every dumping ground of all the [tasks] that we don't have anybody to do (Joanne, Focus Group 5 Participant).*

Participants also reported that field education was used as a recruitment strategy, a method of identifying suitable staff and providing the training that new recruits needed before having to pay them. This is consistent with research from Australia (Barton, Bell, & Bowles, 2005) that found evidence of placements being used as a recruitment mechanism. In contrast, a national Aotearoa survey that found that field educators were not focused on recruitment (Hay et al., 2006). However, although practitioners may not share the view that the goal of field education is to address workforce issues, the data from this research suggests that it is still an influential viewpoint in the workplace. This is reflected in comments made by Lydia about the development of knowledge, skills and values that graduates would then bring to the workforce.

> *It definitely is a recruitment strategy, because if you can get people to have an understanding and a passion, then they're likely to want to come back and use their skills and what they've learnt through varsity and through their placements in somewhere like this (Lydia, Individual Interview Participant).*

The recruitment discourse within agencies also appeared to influence the way field educators measured the success of placements. Participants talked about successful placements being those that led to a student being recruited, although it was acknowledged that there was still some value if the student went to work for another

social service organisation. Field educators also described their focus on exposing students to the reality of practice and assessing students' competence and readiness for practice so that they were prepared to join the future workforce. Whilst the findings from the individual interviews suggest that these ideas were all related to an organisational concern with workforce resources, not all field educators assimilated these ideas into their practice and some resisted the perception of field education prevalent in their agency context.

The alternate perspective to students being viewed as a workforce resource was the idea of field education being a protected learning space. Some participants described an emphasis on students acquiring what was required to pass the assessment, whereas others suggested a focus on broader student learning. For example, Kelly talked about providing a supportive learning environment so that students could try out some professional tasks with support.

> *It's about the student's growth and development and their having exposure to a learning opportunity in a supportive environment, having a go at some things with the safety of somebody that's going to walk beside them (Kelly, Individual Interview Participant).*

Participants in this research described their enthusiasm for watching students learn and gain knowledge. This is consistent with findings from research with nursing field educators who were also motivated by seeing students learn (Rebholz, 2013). Some field educators in the current study appeared to simply enjoy witnessing the learning process and valued the changes that occurred for students. For others, they specifically valued the contribution they were able to make to the learning process. In both cases it was the student's learning, the knowledge development that the field educator facilitated, that acted as the goal motivating the activity system. Claire talked about the moments when a student seemed to have a sudden breakthrough in their understanding or when they gained particular insight. She commented that she felt more effective when contributing to this kind of learning moment than she did in her normal social work practice. Lydia said that even a small sign of development in the student's knowledge was reward enough; large leaps in learning may not be required for field educators to feel motivated to continue working with students.

> *I think if you can see those flickers of light come on too, that's reward enough. I think if you can see a person grow, and it might only be a short space of time, but you see them take a step forward in their learning and their understanding, that's a reward as far as I'm concerned. You don't need anything else (Lydia, Individual Interview Participant).*

A key idea mentioned during the interviews was that field education provided the opportunities for students to integrate theory and practice. This has been the traditional perspective on the purpose of field education, although contested by those who suggest a focus on reflective learning (Ryan, Toohey, & Hughes, 1996). Practitioners in the present study talked about weaving theory and practice together so that students saw an integrated whole. Participants also described a process of teaching students about the realities of practice, providing a space for them to connect classroom learning to practice contexts. Exposing students to different styles of work or fields of practice was also mentioned by field educators. For example, Kelly was concerned that students should have an opportunity to experience community development as a counterbalance to the increasing influence of casework models. This focus on professional breadth might be consistent with the objectives of generic social work education but is one that contrasts with a focus on preparing students for a specific workplace (Healy & Meagher, 2007).

## 5.1.1 Object Tension

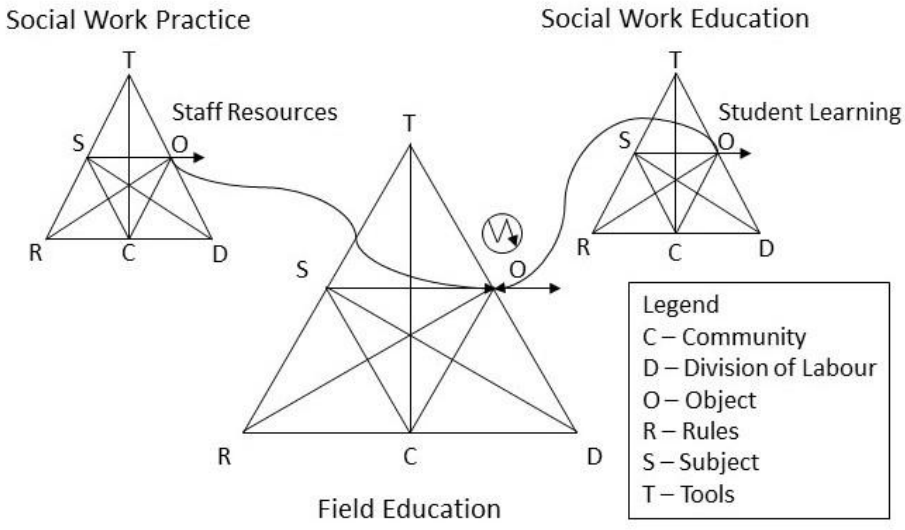


***Figure 5-1: Object tension in field education.***

My analysis of the data from the individual interviews suggested a tension between three dominant viewpoints about the object of field education: professional responsibility, workforce response and student learning. A tension in the object node of an activity system signifies conflicting ideas about the purpose of the activity that are internalised by the actors involved in the work. In the case of field education, the conflicting influences on the object appear to also connect to two other activity systems, social work practice and social work education. Diagrammatically this tension is illustrated in Figure 5-1.

Figure 5-1 shows that the activity of social work practice is oriented towards the object of staff resources, and the activity of social work education towards student learning. These influences lead to a tension in the activity of field education that results in practitioners being unsure if the object of working with students is to relieve staffing tensions, or to protect student learning, or both. Individual experiences of this tension vary; however, at the level of the activity system as a whole the conflicting perspectives are a disruption that may signal the potential for change. Individual participants in my research described their actions to manage this tension, but at the level of the activity system, it may remain unresolved.

## 5.2 Guidance and Support

Field educators in this research talked about their experience of receiving guidance and support in their role. Some participants described the assistance they received from managers or colleagues in their practice context, from field liaison staff, or from other field educators. In contrast, others described an absence of support, or even obstruction of this work. Within activity theory, this situation could be described as originating in the community involved in field education and the way in which labour is divided amongst participants. The community is constituted from all the actors involved in the activity, who then determine how tasks are distributed to best serve the object of the activity (Engeström, 1987). Members may also belong to related communities focused on other activities and undertake assigned tasks in those contexts. Field educators are the primary members of the community related to the activity of field education, but social work colleagues, academic staff and students can also be considered participants who contribute their labour. Each of these community members are also participants in other intersecting communities. The contrasting experiences of guidance and support described by participants in this research suggest tensions created by field educators

working at the interface of activity system communities related to both social work practice and education.

Participants in this study described the support they received in the context of the professional team they were located in. In research undertaken by Waterhouse, McLagan and Murr (2011) support from managers and colleagues within the employing agency was identified as critical and yet often limited. Some participants in my study did identify assistance from their manager in the form of supervision and suggestions for student activities. In some settings, a senior member of staff would make the arrangements for placement and this was identified as supportive in many cases. In contrast, other participants identified what might be described as benign neglect; managers would get involved if required but generally hoped that the field educator would resolve any problems. This confirms Maidment's (2000b,) findings that managers are often only interested in field education when there are problems. Simeon described this kind of experience, suggesting that he would discuss his work in supervision simply as a contingency in case of some crisis.

> *The first time there was almost no input at all from management. In supervision, I talked about it but there wasn't anything coming back. It was like reporting where I was at just in case, I don't know, I was run over by a car or something so that at least one person knew what I was doing. I reported it but that was it (Simeon, Individual Interview Participant).*

Some participants appeared to see this kind of disengagement as a positive thing and indicated that they tried to keep managers away from field education as much as possible, consistent with Maidment's (2000b) findings of field educators hiding the impact of their work. This may have been connected with some participants' anxiety that managers would place limitations on the role if they became aware that it was impacting on other areas of practice. This concern indicates that participants were operating on the periphery of some organisations in which practice with clients was seen to be far more important than work with students.

Field educators in Aotearoa have also identified the importance of collegial support in research undertaken by Hay, O'Donoghue and Blagdon (2006). However, participants in the present study identified contrasting experiences, similar to those related to support from managers. Several examples were provided of situations where teams

supported field educators, particularly by allowing students to observe in a range of situations. Anne explained that she took a proactive approach to gaining support from colleagues and had developed a tool to help organise this into a calendar for the student to work with different practitioners. In contrast to the idea of supportive colleagues, some participants described their colleagues as being antagonistic towards students or at least avoiding engagement with them. For example, Simeon explained that his colleagues were openly antagonistic when he took a student on placement in a practice context that had not provided field education in six years. More commonly, practitioners described their colleagues as simply avoiding contact with students wherever possible. Both Michelle and Remi identified workload as the primary reason that their colleagues offered limited support to the field education process.

Workload was a key concern identified by participants and a barrier that prevented some social workers offering placements, which is consistent with previous research both internationally (Waterhouse et al., 2011) and in Aotearoa (Maidment, 2000b). There were examples of field educators in the present study receiving a reduced caseload or protected time for working with students. However, it was far more common for practitioners to talk about trying to manage the work with students on top of their normal responsibilities. Robert also indicated that even when students were able to manage some of their own workload, he had to be careful that at the end of the placement he was not left with a higher caseload than when the student started.

> *I don't get any less caseload. In fact what you get, if you've got a good student during their placement, they might get three-four-five cases allocated to them, but when they go it comes back on your caseload. You've got to be really careful that if you put too much time into them and don't get enough back and then you get dumped with an extra three or four cases at the end of it as well (Robert, Individual Interview Participant).*

The issue of workload pressures and lack of time was a frequent topic within the focus groups. Participants talked about the challenge of developing practice because practitioners lack the time to engage in this work. The need for organisations to legitimise field education was referred to in several focus groups as an important criteria for the development of practice. Jessica identified how field education is not seen as a core area of work by social service agencies and so sufficient resources are not provided for field educators.

> *I think the big thing is that field education, taking a student, is seen as a peripheral add-on. That's the thing, isn't it? You know, by our organisations and it's not the same in other professions (Jessica, Focus Group 5 Participant).*

These comments suggest that field educators not only risk a lack of support and recognition in their work setting but can also find that working with students increases their work in the longer term. Although some practitioners reported supportive managers and colleagues, along with recognition of their workload, the overall picture was of variability and field educators being unable to predict the level of support they would receive from their professional community.

In addition to comments about the level of support from colleagues, participants talked about the assistance they received from the education institution that they worked with. For example, participants referenced the value of the training provided by the academic institution and suggested this was invaluable both for initial preparation and for ongoing support. However, several participants said they had not completed the training prior to working with students; it was not mandatory and they had been asked to take a student at short notice. Earlier research in Aotearoa (Maidment, 2000b) also found that the majority of field educators completed introductory training but only a small minority engaged in more in-depth study. Two participants in the focus groups conducted in the present study had completed extensive field educator training overseas, but several also described starting to work with students without preparation. The participants who had not completed training prior to their first student felt unprepared and lacking in confidence, although most did complete the training at a later date. Mark commented that initially, he did not know how to approach working with students on placement because he had not completed the training.

> *I felt that I didn't have a clue what I was doing. Yeah, but it proved to be not completely… it was true, but I really felt like I wasn't sure if I was adequate. It was about, was I adequately prepared for this to be a tutor and look after a student (Mark, Individual Interview Participant).*

Previous research has shown that support from academic staff is a significant factor in field educator satisfaction (Bogo, 2006). Urdang (1999) argues that field liaison staff should offer support as social workers transition to an education-focused role, and

research undertaken by Zuchowski (2015a) suggests field liaison staff are aware of the importance of supporting field educators. Participants in this study also described the value of support they received and in some instances noted the value of the knowledge that the academic staff had about the students or the assessment process. Participants also said that they sought feedback from academic staff about whether they were providing effective teaching, although some described their frustration at a lack of guidance. A frequent area of concern was the lack of direction about the assessment process and procedural changes without communication. Mark had so resigned himself to this situation that he approached each placement afresh, expecting that the assessment requirements would have changed. Rebekah adopted a different approach and expressed a desire for easy access to someone for advice about what she was expected to do. She used a metaphor about being confronted by rapids and having to paddle fast, which clearly expressed the sense of urgency and need to get on with the process even though there may be a lack of guidance.

> *I would have liked to have access to someone on-site in the organisation who knew the process and knew what was expected of me because that wasn't there. I can't remember if I didn't know or didn't reach out and ring up the [academic institution] and say, 'Look, I'm really floundering here'. It was like the boat's going down the stream and the rapids are coming so just paddle hard. That was really difficult for me because I had a real sense of apprehension and worry that in amongst all that muddle my student wasn't gonna get to where she needed to go. That was very uncomfortable (Rebekah, Individual Interview Participant).*

Although participants in this study made reference to the support that they received from field liaison staff, examples were also provided of a tension in this relationship. Several participants talked about the field liaison role in terms of auditing, most vividly described by Simeon who suggested that their focus was not to help resolve concerns but simply to point out the problems. His rather jaundiced view of human resources managers, which he compared to field liaison staff, strongly suggested that he did not feel supported but rather felt insecure about being exposed for poor field education practice.

> *He [field liaison staff] was okay to talk to and to deal with, although he did sound like an HR type person. You know how HR people can be quite*

> *threatening because that's what they tend to do? They're there actually to shaft you, but they tend to have this pretence that they're there to support you. I don't think anybody's in any doubt that they're there to shaft people (Simeon, Individual Interview Participant).*

This concern was expressed by a number of participants and confirmed in the focus groups. In the fifth focus group, Wendy talked about the limited support from academic staff and Joanne talked about her experience of conflict when her assessment of a student did not match the expectations of the academic staff. These experiences highlight that field educators have to manage a work context in which they sometimes receive support from academic staff but may also be left with a lack of guidance. At worse field educators may feel vulnerable to unexpected criticism for aspects of their work.

## 5.2.1 Division of Labour Tension

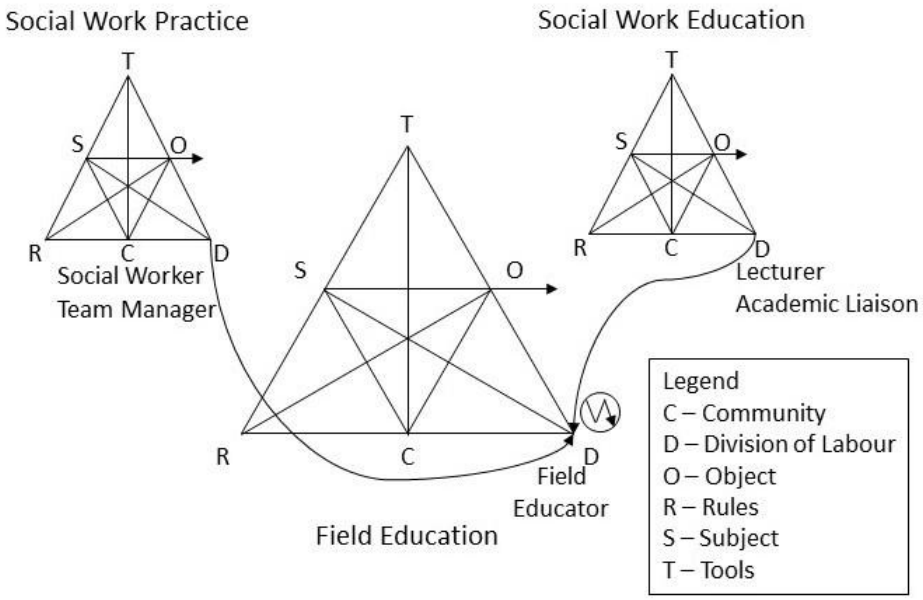


***Figure 5-2: Division of labour tension between three activity systems connected to field education.***

My analysis of the interviews undertaken in this research suggests that field educators seek guidance and support from colleagues in the professional communities that they belong to. Although participants gave examples of the assistance they received from social work colleagues, line managers and academic staff, their experiences appeared to be quite variable. Some participants described benign neglect or disinterest from the community involved in the delivery of social work services. Others explained their sense of being audited by academic staff assigned to support the student and field

educator during a placement. These findings indicate a lack of agreement about the division of labour in the activity system and uncertainty about who is responsible for supporting field educators. The frequent references to a lack of time, due to an expectation that field educators will manage their normal workload, also indicates tension in relation to decisions about the relative importance of tasks assigned to field educators. These tensions are illustrated in Figure 5-2.

The activity system diagram in Figure 5-2 illustrates that the division of labour in field education is interconnected with that in social work practice and education. Field educators contribute towards the object of social work practice and decisions about the division of labour in this context create workload pressures for their work with students. The division of labour in social work education determines the assignment of the field liaison role and the associated support for the student and field educator. These activity systems, therefore, impact on the work of field educators, contributing to a tension in the division of labour within the community. Participants described individual strategies for responding to this tension but this had not resulted in sufficient disturbance to result in the transformation of practice.

## 5.3 Rules and Boundaries

During the individual interviews, participants were asked about the rules that governed field education: explicit written policies and implicit unwritten expectations. Field educators talked about the absence of specific policies for students in their workplace and the use of generic management policies that positioned students as new members of staff. Practitioners also referred to the unwritten expectation that students would not be involved in high-risk work but gave examples of when this would be ignored out of necessity. The academic institutions also provided practitioners with written policies describing what should happen during a placement. Although participants identified these as engendering confidence, they also talked about the variation between different academic institutions and identified a need for universal approaches. These competing sources of rules for field education indicate tensions within and between activity systems.

Participants in this research did make reference to specific field education policies. Some practitioners mentioned that the academic institution had a memorandum of understanding with their employer for the provision of a specified number of

placements. Shardlow (2000) has suggested that such agreements are an important part of academic institutions' legal responsibilities, although research undertaken by Torry, Furness and Wilkinson (2005) suggests that even when such agreements are in place there may be problems with their implementation. There is less evidence in the literature of organisations having policies or procedures to guide the work of field educators. In my research, Mark talked about a student policy that had been developed by practitioners in his agency to describe the activities that would be undertaken. Michelle also referred to a specific policy about the orientation of social work students in a health setting. However, these policy examples were the exception rather than the rule. More commonly, participants said that they were unaware of a specific agency policy for field education and doubted that one existed. For example, Rebekah said that no one had drawn her attention to a student policy and she felt that she was left to decide herself how to approach this area of work.

> *Not that I'm aware of. Not that's been brought to my… you're largely left to manage it yourself so that you determine for yourself what priority you give to your role as a fieldwork educator (Rebekah, Individual Interview Participant).*

In the absence of specific policies to guide the work of field educators, practitioners talked about using the standard management policies for parts of the field education process. Several participants talked about the procedures related to staff vetting, orientation, computer access, or vehicle access, which all followed the standard processes used for new recruits. Participants noted that the use of these organisational procedures extended to treating students as though they were temporary staff, which created ethical challenges when delays meant that students could not technically undertake any work. During the first focus group, participants talked about the impact of recruitment policies on field education. Janice noted the changes that had resulted from the introduction of the Vulnerable Children Act[18] (2014) in relation to safety checks for staff, which had been applied to students and necessitated far more work.

[18] The Vulnerable Children Act (2014) was introduced to improve protection for children at risk of abuse or neglect. The Act established more stringent mandatory background screening for all employees and contractors of government or community agencies who have regular unsupervised contact with children.

This difficulty illustrates the problems that participants faced due to a lack of specific policies that addressed the unique issues related to working with students.

Despite a lack of written policies for field education, participants did identify unwritten rules covering the work. Minimising risk to clients and students was an important example of an unwritten policy. Practitioners talked about the need to trust that the academic institution had considered whether students were appropriate to work with vulnerable client groups. Participants also made reference to a number of scenarios that they considered too risky for students to be involved with: crisis intervention, home visits without experienced staff, male students visiting female clients alone, transporting children alone, or visits to homes where abusive individuals were present. However, field educators also reported that they would sometimes experience conflict with their team because they would protect the student from higher risk work, indicating that the unwritten rules were not necessarily universally held.

Although there appeared to be a common consensus that students should not be involved in higher risk activities, several participants made reference to situations where this was ignored due to perceived urgency or necessity. Ruth noted that there were occasions when she would allow a student to be involved in work with higher risks but would expect her line manager to reprimand her the following day.

> *Well, that was like an unwritten thing we just had in the office, they just don't go on criticals. Then the odd time when they were really, really desperate they'd take them out and then you'd get in trouble the next day (Ruth, Individual Interview Participant).*

Whilst it appears that participants attempted to ensure that students were only involved in lower risk activities, the workload pressures and lack of resources in the team resulted in participants ignoring these boundaries. This seems to connect with the perspective that participants identified in many agencies: that students were an additional resource to help respond to workload demands. Field educators, therefore, found themselves in situations where they had to act as a broker, managing the risks for clients and students and balancing these against the pressures and necessities of social work practice in the team. This brokering indicates the presence of conflict between the unwritten rules related to managing risk and the necessity to respond to the workload demands of the team.

In addition to the influence of management policies and concepts of risk, participants discussed the role of the requirements set by the academic institution about what activities should take place during a placement. For example, Kelly talked about the academic institution having expectations for field education and it was her job to meet these wherever possible. Her comments suggest an almost contractual arrangement where the field educator provides certain learning activities that the academic institution has purchased.

> *Well, I've always seen . . . that it's directed a lot by the university or by polytech in this case and that it's about their expectations for the placement and from the training provider or the educational provider and how we endeavour to meet as much of that as possible kind of stuff. That's how I've always viewed it (Kelly, Individual Interview Participant).*

Although field educators appeared to be clear about meeting the requirements of the academic institution, several commented about the difficulty of doing so in specific contexts. For example, Rebekah said that it was difficult to complete process recordings and structured observations in her context because they did not fit with her style of work. Martin commented at length about the way that the academic institution imposed certain requirements onto field educators, rather than working from an understanding of how work was completed in the placement context. He suggested that learning goals and activities should be developed from an analysis of the field educator's job description, but acknowledged that the academic institution also had to ensure regulatory criteria were met. These comments implied a tension between the external imposition of learning activity requirements and the reality of daily social work practice. Field educators had to manage this tension, interpreting the requirements of the academic institution to achieve the best fit with the work that was undertaken in their context. Clearly comprehending the academic requirements was therefore critical, but unfortunately, several practitioners in this study indicated a lack of understanding.

The range of requirements set by different academic institutions appears to have been an added complication for field educators as they sought to manage the tension between generic regulations and their specific work context. Participants in the interviews talked about the difficulty of comprehending the regulations of multiple academic institutions because each one had different requirements. This issue was specifically discussed in the third focus group and Kate said that each academic institution had different

procedural expectations, although Helen noted that the required student competence requirements were the same. Interestingly, several participants in the individual interviews said that they felt more confident with the expectations of the academic institution where they completed their training. It was unclear whether this perception was well founded because there were changes within all programmes at the time of this research, due to regulation requirements. However, analysis of the data suggested that practitioners were anxious about meeting the expectations of the academic institution and so some historical familiarity with the programme helped to reduce this concern.

Whilst discussing the challenge of responding to the requirements from multiple academic institutions, Rachel suggested that there should be a universal approach. Her comments were not a critique of the liaison support provided by individual academic institutions, rather they were focused on the need for a single organisation to support field educators working across different institutions.

> *I know each training institution is different, but to have one umbrella that we work under that's universal, it doesn't matter where your training is being done through, I don't know. I don't know whether somebody could have a role as being the contact person or an email address if you've got questions and to be encouraged for educators to actually make contact if they have. I think that for me, not that I had heaps of questions, but it would be nice to know that that was available and that it's encouraged whereas I feel that it's a little bit inconvenient because everybody's so busy. Maybe I'm wrong (Rachel, Individual Interview Participant).*

Martin said that academic institutions had “things to abide by”, that he was unaware of but which shaped how things were done. Both statements seem to suggest that field educators felt uncertain that they had all of the information about what shaped the education context and so they were unable to suggest solutions to the challenges. These findings indicate that field educators work with a tension between the rules set by the academic institution and the realities of the practice context in which they are situated. Multiple versions of the academic requirements exacerbate this tension and participants appeared confused about how best to respond to the competing demands.

### 5.3.1 Rules Tension

Consideration of the influence of both the social work practice team and the academic institution, on the rules and boundaries followed by field educators, suggests the presence of further tension and conflict in the activity system. These tensions are represented in the activity diagram in Figure 5-3.

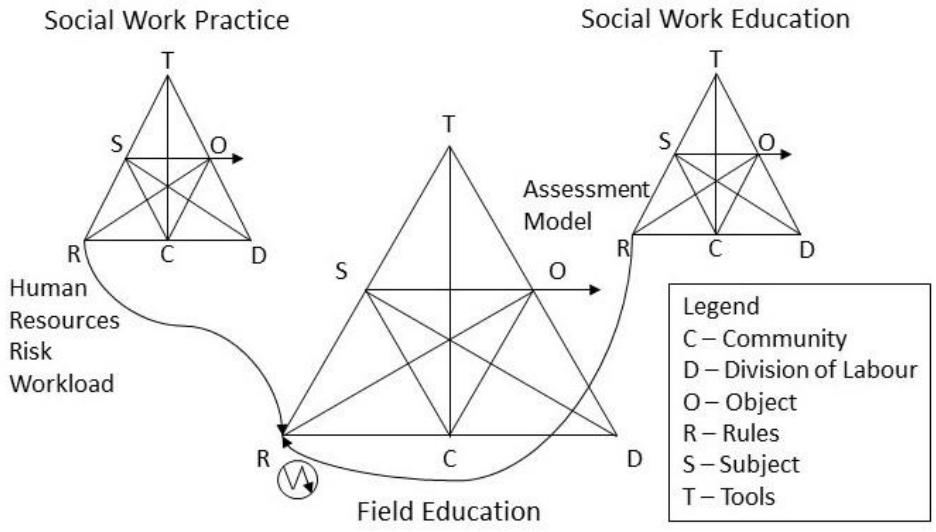


***Figure 5-3: Rules tension between three activity systems connected to field education.***

Figure 5-3 illustrates participants' descriptions of the influence on their practice of a lack of agency policies to govern work with students, and the difficulties that could arise when applying standard human resources policies. They also talked about the competing demands of managing risk and responding to workload demands. Participants gave examples of the difficulty of meeting the academic requirements for placement activities when these conflicted with those of specific work contexts. They also talked about the impact of working with different assessment models. These findings suggest that field educators practice in contexts with considerable potential for tension between activity systems in relation to the rules governing their object-oriented activity with students.

## 5.4 Methods and Tools

As part of the individual interview process, I asked participants to talk about the activities that they engaged students in during a placement, and a number of different influences were identified. Firstly, practitioners talked about a process of using

orientation tasks for new staff, observation of a range of practitioners, increasing independence and demonstration of competence. This approach appeared to be aligned to the objective of preparing students for practice in a specific work context and connects with the idea of apprenticeship. The second influence was the assessment requirements and documentation provided by the academic institution. Field educators used the assessment requirements to guide their approach with students and felt more confident when they had the documentation in advance of the placement. At the same time, some participants found the assessment regulations to be complicated and there was evidence that they acted as a barrier to practice. The third source of methods and tools was the personal experience of practitioners and their creative attempts to find effective strategies for working with students. Both positive and negative life experiences, including those as a student on placement, provided a source of ideas for field educators about the most effective pedagogical approaches.

My analysis of the individual interview data revealed that field educators used a learning process with students that replicated the steps followed with new employees. Participants talked about the orientation process used with new employees, which appeared to provide an initial framework for identifying learning activities for students. They also talked about the value of networking as part of the orientation phase, both internally within the organisation and also externally. Time spent reading policies and procedures was also identified by some practitioners as a valuable learning task, although others disputed this because they thought that new staff rarely read all the policies. Stephanie said that the orientation phase could take two or three weeks before the next phase of the placement could begin. Sarah mentioned that this process was basically the same as for new staff, involving a package of material, training and meetings.

> *On the whole, a student comes in and they are, for all intents and purposes, probably treated like a new staff member. They've gone through the same orientation packages, the same initial computer training stuff, participate in all of the meetings (Sarah, Individual Interview Participant).*

Observation was also frequently mentioned by participants as an early part of the field education process, involving observation of a range of practitioners and a variety of work. Some practitioners preferred for students to observe the field educator's practice before moving on to other colleagues, whereas others engaged students with a range of

team members from the start. Anne had developed a tool that helped her to schedule student's time with a range of her colleagues and several other participants talked about the importance of exposing students to a variety of approaches to practice. However, other practitioners talked about protecting students from exposure to poor practice, although some thought this could also help students develop their own ideas about the best approaches to social work. Regardless of the specific approach that field educators adopted, there appeared to be general agreement that exposing students to a variety of styles of practice was valuable for their learning.

Participants also described a process of transitioning students from observing others to being observed themselves. Mark explained that he would watch simple activities like making a phone call to a client and later might observe the student in a group setting, and Rebekah described using teachable moments to provide natural feedback. Field educators described a process of progressive independence, beginning with observation and working towards independent practice. Participants suggested that this process of progressive independence could happen even in contexts with high-risk work if the right level of support was provided. Participants talked about the balance between providing support and stretching the student with their own work and some noted that they had over protected students to begin with but had learnt the importance of giving students independent work.

The importance of exposing students to a variety of social work tasks was also mentioned during the interviews. Practitioners described going to some lengths to ensure that students experienced as much of the social work process as possible, sometimes even arranging for students to spend time in other teams if required. Rachel articulated this objective most clearly, suggesting that her aim was for students to leave the placement having been exposed to every aspect of the work and ideally being able to complete every task.

> *Everything that I do in my role I want the student to have experience in that area so that when they finish their placement basically they can do everything, they've had experience in every aspect - not do everything. Printing and filing case notes, doing referrals, independent visits, co-visits, observations, everything that we do including going out into the community and networking with other agencies (Rachel, Individual Interview Participant).*

My analysis of the interview data suggests that field educators used the work tasks in their practice context as a framework for deciding what learning opportunities to provide for students, with the objective of preparing students for work in the team. Participants talked about using the staff orientation process as the initial set of tasks for students, followed by observation of a range of practitioners. Field educators then described a process of observing students undertaking certain tasks and increasingly developing independent practice in the full range of work undertaken in the team. This apprenticeship style approach to field education appeared to be based on the idea that a placement is the opportunity for students to learn how to complete the various tasks required of social workers in a specific context. This is an example of how the perceived object of field education influences the tools used to complete the activity.

In addition to an apprenticeship approach to field education, the assessment model prescribed by the academic institution appeared to be another major influence on the practice of field educators. Participants explained how the assessment materials helped them in the preparation phase before a placement and their frustration where the placement manual was not provided early enough. It appeared that participants found security in the assessment requirements from the academic institution. Ruth said that she felt unprepared before her first student but the assessment booklet helped to address her concerns.

> *I wasn't prepared - but it was actually okay. . . To begin with I was a little bit anxious, was I doing it right? Was I going to get it wrong? Is there more I should have been doing for the student? But when I got the booklet and I went through it and the student was coming in and we were talking about it, it felt okay (Ruth, Individual Interview Participant).*

Participants identified the student's assessment as one of their primary concerns and suggested that meeting this objective was their main responsibility. Participants also talked about responding to the anxiety of students about meeting the assessment requirements. Anne commented about the concern shown by students to complete the assessment requirements and suggested that the teaching and learning process was dominated by these expectations.

> *That's what is very important for the student: I've gotta get this ticked off, I've gotta get… you know, and get their folder or file completed and*

> *addressing each of their goals. So it [the teaching and learning process] does seem quite driven by the expectation of the educational institution they come from and what's expected of them (Anne, Individual Interview Participant).*

The content of the supervision process also appeared to be dominated by the assessment process and participants talked about reviewing and providing feedback about each learning goal in every session.

There was also evidence from the interviews of the negative impact of the assessment requirements. Participants talked about the complicated nature of the process, some suggesting that this had increased over time. Anne said that the process had become so complex that two of her colleagues had decided to stop offering student placements, reflecting issues identified in previous research. Studies have shown that field educators lack confidence in assessment processes even following training (Waterhouse et al., 2011), and field education co-ordinators have identified this as a significant area of practitioner weakness (Vinton & Wilke, 2011). The level of complication identified by participants in the present research appeared to be exacerbated by working with several academic institutions because they each had a different set of expectations. Field educators also talked about the assessment requirements being generic and the difficulty of meeting these in unique contexts, possibly also reflecting a lack of confidence with academic assessments.

Shortly prior to undertaking the individual interviews in this research, both of the local academic institutions modified their field education assessment model and participants explained how these changes had impacted on their practice. Chris commented that the revised assessment model was more structured and had helped him to focus more clearly on the objectives of field education. Anne said that she had modified her teaching approach when the assessment model had changed because she wanted to make sure the student met the revised expectations. However, she also commented on the additional time involved in the new process, suggesting that it had been almost impossible to find the time to understand the new requirements. Participants suggested that the new assessment models had been introduced without explanation, guidance or training and this made their task particularly challenging.

My analysis of the individual interviews suggested that field educators used the assessment materials provided by the academic institution as a guide for their work with students. Practitioners appeared to find a sense of security in following the requirements of the assessment, particularly when they first started in the field educator role. Participants used the learning goals and tasks set by the academic institution as a focus for supervision and for deciding which learning activities to focus on. At the same time, the complexity of the process, frequent changes in expectations, and lack of guidance impacted negatively on field educators. The interview data indicated that field educators adopted a teaching model shaped by the assessment requirements, even though these processes also created barriers for some practitioners.

Although participants in this study talked about the influence of the work tasks in their practice context, and the academic assessment model, some also appeared to develop their own pedagogical model for field education. Practitioners talked about a number of key life experiences that informed their approach to field education, including getting married young, having children, living in a commune, philosophical thinking, or growing up with a social worker. Even negative experiences were informative for some field educators, such as having exposure to poor social work practice. A range of life experiences were mentioned but engagement with teaching roles appeared to be particularly influential. Some participants had worked as teachers or lecturers, whilst others talked about the influence of more informal roles such as tutoring people to play a musical instrument. Life experiences prior to becoming a social worker, or at least unrelated to professional practice, appeared to act as a resource that informed the approach that field educators adopted when working with students.

Experience as a student, particularly during field placements, was also identified as a significant influence. Field educators discussed what had been helpful for their own learning on placement and said that they had adopted these same approaches. Independent practice, work related to interest areas, networking with other agencies, focusing on strengths, effective feedback and a focus on the application of theory were all approaches that practitioners identified as ones they had transferred from their own experience as a student. Negative experiences were also influential, such as limited advice or support and overly critical feedback, and field educators talked about their attempts to protect students from these experiences.

The third significant area of personal history related to the participant's professional experience. Some practitioners talked about their exposure to field education within their work team, observing both effective and poor teaching. Others referred to the influence of line management or supervision experience. Professional development opportunities, particularly in supervision were also mentioned as significant learning that informed the development of a unique approach to teaching.

A range of personal experiences appeared to play a significant role in shaping the framework of practice adopted by field educators, and these were responded to in creative ways. Some participants even talked about developing their own model of field education. For example, Anne said that she had developed a model based on a combination of reflective learning and strengths-based practice.

> *I drew up my own model, combining that, with the strengths approach too, and so I instil a reflective learning-come-strengths approach to my supervision. That's what I see as the most valuable, because one is, I think you only learn by reflecting, anyway, and then strengths is the encouraging (Anne, Individual Interview Participant).*

Other participants talked about their use of trial and error in developing their pedagogical approach. Maidment (2000a) noted a similar phenomenon in her research, which she called a "haphazard" (p. 206) approach to field education. Sometimes the personal developments noted by participants in the present study originated in observation of other practitioners, and for other practitioners through experience working with students. Examples included: moderating the amount of time spent coaching students, a group supervision approach, an anxiety management technique, a student briefing tool, an orientation checklist and an observation model. Each of these illustrated the creativity of field educators, and their ability to draw on a range of experiences to find solutions to the challenges they faced in teaching students.

### 5.4.1 Tools Tension

Participants in the individual interviews appeared to use their personal creativity and trial and error to develop effective approaches to the teaching task. This trial and error approach was confirmed in the focus group interviews. For example, Janice noted that she had developed her pedagogical approach through experimenting with different methods, but still believed that she had been able to develop an effective approach.

> *I was just making it up as I went along, and I think I've developed a really good 'made-up' practice that I do. It seems to work (Janice, Focus Group 1 Participant).*

Given this individualised approach to the development of appropriate methods for working with students, the influence of tools from related activity systems appears to be particularly significant. Within activity theory, these kinds of tools that actors transfer between activity systems are referred to as boundary objects (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999). The use of boundary objects from social work practice and education is not always a good fit and creates a tension within the field education activity system in relation to the tools used by field educators, as illustrated in Figure 5-4.

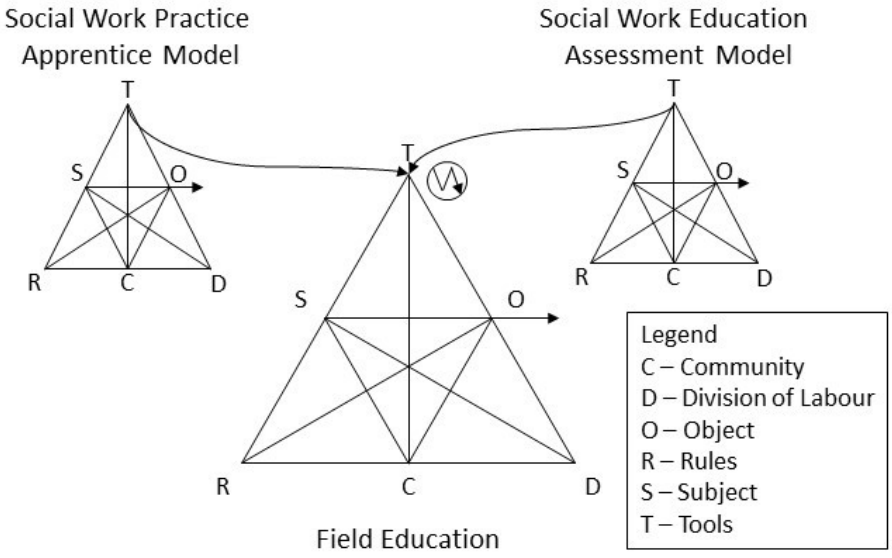


***Figure 5-4: Tools tension between three activity systems connected to field education.***

Figure 5-4 illustrates how field educators are influenced by tools, as boundary objects, from two other activity systems. Alongside their work with students, field educators also have roles as social workers within the social work practice activity system and draw on an apprentice model focused on students completing all of the tasks of a social worker. An assessment model from social work education is also influential, particularly embodied within the assessment paperwork that field educators are required to use by academic institutions. Whilst these different tools may not necessarily be recognised by field educators as in conflict with each other, participants in this study appeared to work towards balancing these two different approaches. The tension created by trying to balance the influence of these different tools is illustrated in figure 5-4 by

the zigzag arrow inside the circle and indicates a site for the possible development of practice.

## 5.5 Summary and Implications

When I began this investigation I was working in an academic institution and had responsibility for supporting students and field educators as part of the field education programme. I had personally experienced the transition from being a social work practitioner to a social work educator and had developed the view that field educators needed support to also adopt an educator identity. I was struck by the lack of knowledge that practitioners had about educational theory and the apparent reliance on their knowledge of social work practice to guide their work with students. I held the view that social work practitioners were engaged in a process of becoming social work educators when they took on the role of field educators and that a number of factors must influence this learning and ultimately the activity of field education.

This conceptualisation of the professional development process resulted in an interest in the factors that influenced learning and practice and therefore might need to be manipulated or modified in any professional development process. However, I also wanted to avoid an overly prescriptive approach to the range of factors that might be involved and sought a theoretical model that would trigger fresh thinking. Activity theory is a powerful conceptual framework for analysing complex human systems and identifying potential sites for catalysing change (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010) and it provided me with a framework that stretched beyond my initial considerations. Engeström's (1987) triangular model also provided visual tools that assisted in the communication of analysis findings. Although it is not possible to represent every nuance of a complex system of interacting actors or the variety of individual field educator experiences, these tools provided useful insights and suggested areas for further action. Using the tools provided by activity theory revealed contradictions within the nodes related to the object, division of labour, rules and tools and therefore suggested potential sites for change.

My analysis of the interviews suggested that there were a number of factors that influenced participant's motivation for engaging in field education. Practitioners talked about their personal experience: in early life, as a student, as a social worker, as a supervisor and as a manager. Each of these contributed to a sense of professional

responsibility to provide placements, sometimes to protect students from poor experiences and in others to emulate inspirational practice. Each practitioner described a different set of factors related to the influence of personal experience on their motivation, and this provided a unique backdrop for other objectives from the social service agency and academic institution. A dominant discourse from within the social service team context was the idea of students being a resource to respond to workforce needs. In some situations, students were seen as a way to address immediate workload pressures and in others, the emphasis was more on a long-term recruitment strategy. In either case, field educators faced the challenge of demonstrating the competence of students for productive practice. This emphasis appeared to create some tensions with the focus of the academic institution on providing a protected learning space. Practitioners described their efforts to protect students from being treated like employees to ensure they had enough space for learning.

Having negotiated a personal orientation towards the object of field education, field educators require guidance and support in their role. Participants in this study described a range of experiences with different levels of assistance from colleagues, managers and academic staff. Some field educators explained that their colleagues were involved in supporting students and their managers provided ideas and the resources needed for teaching and learning. However, examples were also provided of benign neglect; colleagues avoiding involvement with students and managers disinterested unless the work impacted in some way on the normal metrics for measuring the productivity of the team. A similar contrast was evident in relation to the guidance and support provided by the academic institution. Some participants gave examples of responsive field liaison staff who provided assistance when confusion arose or difficulties emerged with specific students. At the same time, practitioners described field liaison staff as auditors who checked that the student was having a positive learning experience but provided limited feedback and advice to the field educator. Field educators appeared to have little control over the quality of the guidance and support that they received and faced significant challenges in responding to the variation across different contexts.

Alongside the guidance and support provided by different colleagues, field educators identified that the rules governing their work could be experienced as supportive. However, in general, participants said that there were no specific policies and procedures in their team context that related to working with students. Standard management policies were therefore frequently employed, particularly during the

recruitment and orientation phases of the placement. Whilst these were helpful to an extent, they also cast students in the role of a new employee, which created a number of problems for field educators. Practitioners also described unwritten rules that meant it was generally unacceptable to engage students in work that might be considered higher risk. However, examples were also provided of this agreement being ignored due to the need to urgently respond to the demands of the workplace. The regulations provided by the academic institution were also identified as supportive by some participants. Countering this view, practitioners also complained that the expectations of academic institutions were not tailored to specific work contexts and the lack of a universal set of academic rules was a frustration for participants. Field educators were therefore faced with the challenge of overcoming a number of obstacles in their work related to the rules and boundaries governing their practice.

Making decisions about the best methods and tools to employ when teaching students also appeared to be an area of tension for the participants in this study. Field educators described a process of engaging students in observing a range of practitioners, followed by observing the students undertaking tasks and then slowly introducing independent work so that students could complete all of the key areas of the role. This approach appeared to be similar to an apprenticeship model that served the demand in the workplace for productive workers or future employees. This contrasted with a focus on the assessment processes that participants described. An assessment centric approach appeared to be concerned with ensuring students completed the academic requirements and passed the final assessment and practitioners said that they used the assessment to structure the learning activities. In the face of these different approaches, practitioners described creative and innovative methods and tools that they used for working with students.

The use of activity theory as an analytical lens helped me to identify each of these sites of tension within the field education activity system. Although each field educator will experience these tensions to different degrees, taking the activity rather than the individual as the unit of analysis identifies the conflict and contradictions within the system as a whole. Engeström (2001) suggests that these kinds of contradictions are indications of the potential for transformational change and when tensions are highlighted to key actors, solutions can be identified. Comparison of the findings from the present study with previous research by Maidment (2000b), suggests that the same tensions have been present in field education in Canterbury for many years. This

indicates that tensions and contradictions have remained unchallenged and perhaps suggests the existence of barriers to transformation. In Chapter 6 I explore some of the barriers to transformation in field education, and then in Chapter 7 I discuss the potential for mobilising the field educator community to respond to some of the challenges identified through this activity theory analysis.

# 6 BARRIERS TO TRANSFORMATION

Although activity theory provided a useful lens to help me identify the range of factors influencing field educator practice and the potential for expansive learning, it failed to explain the historical resistance to change that seemed evident. In Chapter 5 I discussed the analysis I conducted using activity theory, and in this chapter I explain how I complemented this by also using critical pragmatism (Kadlec, 2007) as a lens to view the data both from the individual interviews and focus groups. Pertinent examples from the individual interviews will be provided and triangulated with illustrations from the focus groups. I used inductive analysis to uncover evidence of power dimensions related to the marginal position that field educators hold between education and practice and the personal balancing of care and control. Critical pragmatism also brought the cultural power imbalance between western and indigenous pedagogy into focus. In this chapter I explore these two important themes and consider the implications for transformational change, which Engeström (2001) suggests might be the response to tensions in the field education activity system.

One of the criticisms of activity theory is that it is blind to the power dimensions in work settings that act as barriers to the learning necessary for the transformation of activity systems (Young, 2001). Activity systems do not necessarily evolve towards some idealised future even when the actors are presented with evidence of tension and the need for change (Lektorskii, 2004). Identifying the power dynamics that might work against the apparent triggers for change in field education was therefore important in

this research and in keeping with a perspective informed by critical pragmatism. I began this exploration of barriers to the potential transformation of field education with an inductive analysis of the descriptions provided by participants and a reconsideration of the data.

The first theme I explore in this chapter relates to the power dynamics inherent in participants' descriptions of their work to manage different influences on field education. Participants in the individual interviews provided descriptions of their work that suggested two types of power. Firstly, they described their work to manage the influence of education and practice; integrating theory into practice, advocating for teaching in practice settings, negotiating learning opportunities with colleagues and connecting students with people who could help their learning. Each of these descriptions suggest field educators hold a marginalised position that requires significant negotiation and in some cases a lack of power to bring about change. In contrast, the second theme relates to descriptions of field educators balancing the influence of care and control. Participants talked about caring for students as if they were in a parent-child relationship, and of protecting both students and clients, but some participants also told stories about the inappropriate use of power. My analysis of the interview data suggests that each of these dimensions of power can be more or less significant in any single context, and field educators respond in individual ways, illustrating the complexity of the whole system moving towards the transformation of existing approaches to practice.

The second theme I identified in this phase of data analysis was monoculturalism and it acts as a case example of the collective and individual power dimensions already mentioned. Analysis of the individual interviews revealed an absence of descriptions of how te ao Māori[19] or indigenous pedagogical models influenced field educators. This was surprising because social workers in Aotearoa are ethically obligated to incorporate Māori perspectives and to challenge organisations that adopt monocultural ways of working (ANZASW, 2015). Therefore, this theme was specifically addressed in the focus groups. These discussions revealed that participants were aware of their obligations and were trying to find creative ways to teach students about bicultural

[19] Māori world, Māori worldview.

practice. However, the focus group conversations also suggested that participants believed bicultural practice was implicit in everyday actions, implying personal assumptions and reinforcement of cultural power. Participants did express an interest in contributing to the development of bicultural field education but also identified barriers related to time and workload that suggest their marginal position within their work context. These personal and structural dimensions of power may help explain the resistance to change within the field education system.

## 6.1 Power Dynamics

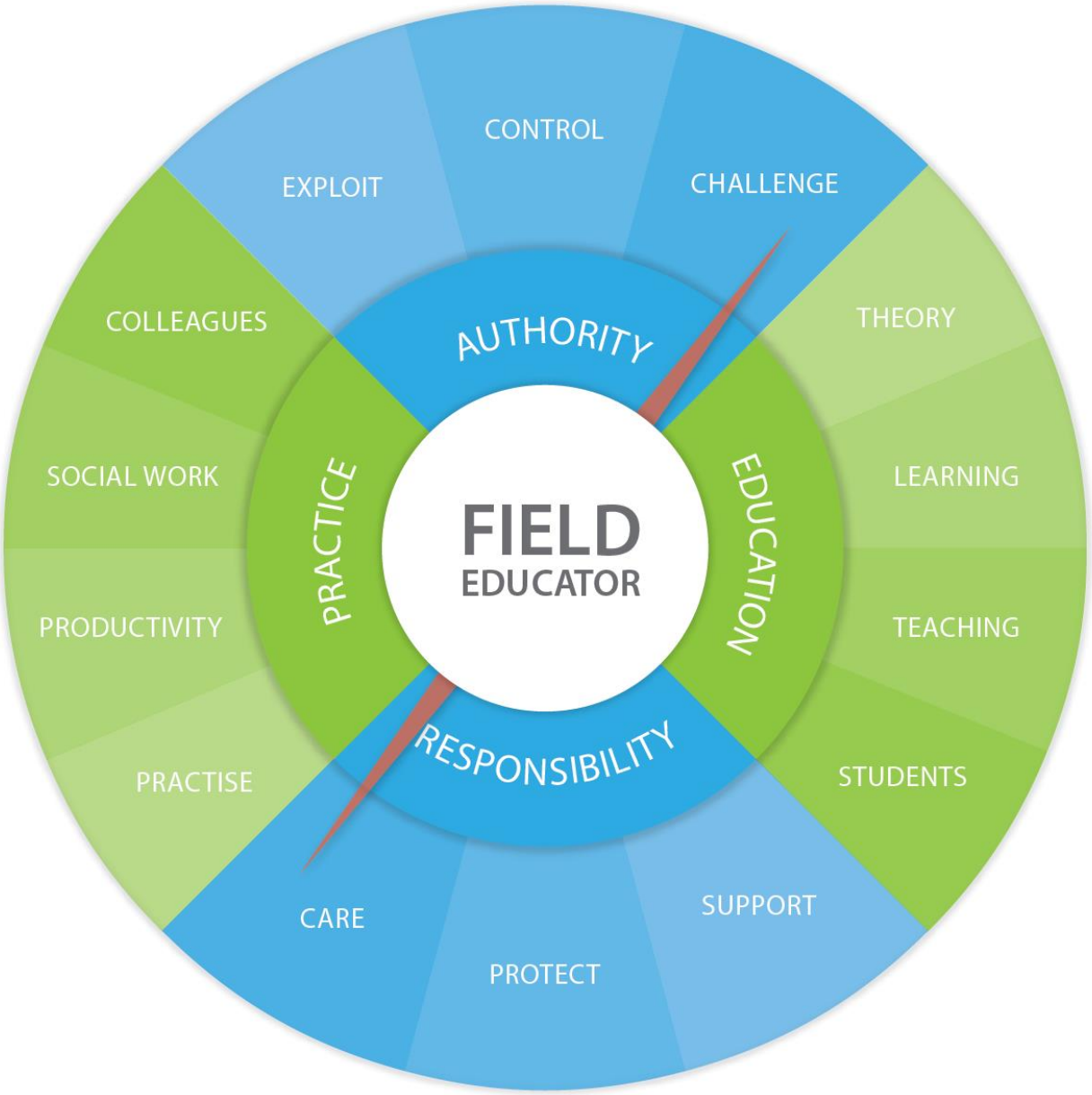


***Figure 6-1: Influences on field education suggesting power dynamics.***

According to Thompson (2006), the power that maintains oppression can be analysed at personal, cultural and structural levels. At the personal level, individuals take actions that reveal certain beliefs and ideas, which maintain oppressive power relations. The cultural level refers to consensus within a community about the way things are and at the structural level institutions reinforce these beliefs. Viewing field education from this perspective suggests that the presence of marginalisation would be expressed and maintained at different levels, both individual and through interactions with colleagues and organisational structures. Analysis of the data collected in this research suggests a number of power dimensions that result in the maintenance of the status quo and these are illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 6-1.

Figure 6-1 illustrates a series of influences on field educators that I identified in the data, which appeared to have embedded power dynamics. The first set of factors related to the integration of *education* and *practice*; participants described four different examples of their attempts to achieve a balance between these influences. Firstly, participants talked about the challenge of connecting the classroom-based learning of *theory* with the *practice* in the agency context. The second example related to being an advocate for field education, persuading managers and colleagues of the value of *teaching* students in the face of significant pressures related to time and workload in *social work* practice. Participants also described negotiating with colleagues to ensure the tasks given to students were related to their *learning* rather than simply about *productivity*. The final example involved connecting *students* with *colleagues* who would act as teachers and contribute valuable learning experiences. In each example of integrating the influence of education and practice, participants appeared to be attempting to create a balance that would minimise the risk of being placed in a marginalised position within the team due to identifying with the student as an outsider. Participants described their work in ways that suggested significant challenge and the need for determination and resilience. The demanding nature of the field educator role may ultimately act as a barrier to transformation if practitioners feel that they lack the energy for a change process.

In addition to the integration of education and practice, participants provided descriptions that suggested their efforts to balance the influence of *responsibility* and *authority*. The examples of this process suggested a power dynamic between the field educator and student, sometimes used benevolently but on occasion in more negative ways. The first example of balancing responsibility and authority was suggested by the

use of parenting language by participants. Participants implied that field educators were like parents, and students were literally referred to as children. These ideas were used in apparently well-meaning ways to suggest a close relationship of *care* balanced against a need to *challenge* students. A second example of balancing responsibility and authority was the work to *protect* students coupled with attempts to resist or *control* the demands of colleagues. In a related example of protection and control the emphasis appeared to be the care of clients by controlling if and when students could work with them, either during the placement or longer term. The final example was identified through stories that participants told about their own placement experiences or their observation of colleagues. These stories involved the abuse of power to *exploit* students for apparently self-serving reasons rather than acting as a *support*. In these three examples of *responsibility* and *authority* there was an implied tension related to the degree of power field educators hold in relation to students. The descriptions provided by participants again indicated their agency in deciding how to respond to this tension. Despite the potential for power to be abused, the picture identified in the data was of the responsibility that field educators felt in relation to both students and clients. This emotional weight may act as a further barrier to expansive learning if practitioners feel overwhelmed by the demands of their role.

### 6.1.1 Integrating Theory and Practice

Participants in the individual interviews talked about the objective of their work in terms of teaching students about the integration of theory and practice. Stephanie described the process of taking a student who had learnt relevant theory and transforming them into a practitioner who could apply that knowledge in practice, suggesting a tension between the two environments.

> *I see my role as a fieldwork teacher to take the learning and education and actually mould that into somebody who can deliver social work in the field, to actually move it into a practice person (Stephanie, Individual Interview Participant).*

Participants in my study identified field education as the opportunity for students to make the connection between the classroom and the workplace. Participants said that it was only when students experienced a concept that they heard about in the classroom that learning was actually completed. Moana suggested that field educators might use

different language than was used in academic institutions but they still applied the same social work theories and models to guide their practise. Field educators are therefore engaged in a process of translating theory into a practice context suggesting they are engaged in a boundary crossing process where they stand between two systems.

Martin highlighted the importance of the integration of theory and practise. He suggested that practise is the best way of learning and therefore field educators must be able to explain the theoretical underpinnings of their work.

> *I think that the best learning – and I truly believe this – is practice. But obviously you have to have the theoretical components to justify why you're practising in that way (Martin, Individual Interview Participant).*

For some participants, this need to explain the theory that underpinned their practise created a degree of anxiety. Rachel identified this challenge, suggesting that she had doubted her own knowledge of theory because she had completed her own education in a polytechnic rather than a university. She reflected that this had been an incorrect assumption but that it had encouraged her to continue to extend her knowledge of theory. Kelly also referred to continued learning of theory and commented that students provided a connection back to an academic environment and encouraged ongoing professional development.

Participants also suggested that some students are very capable academically but struggle to translate this learning into practise. Robert talked about a student who had been achieving high grades but was quite rigid in her attempts to transfer what she had learnt into practise and he had to draw her attention to the difference between the classroom and workplace. Field educators talked about the process of students learning how to apply theory through practical experience. Claire also suggested that this learning takes place when students reflect on their own life challenges and identify theories that explain their experiences. Other participants referred to the learning goals that students brought to placement and the need to interpret these in light of the placement context. Field educators in this study identified the challenge of reinterpreting theory and learning goals into a practice context, and the negotiation of knowledge between academia and practice.

Previous research has shown that the ability of field educators to teach the integration of theory and practice is a significant concern (Murdock et al., 2006) and an important

training need (Clapton et al., 2006; Dettlaff & Dietz, 2004; Fernandez, 2003). The data from the present study suggests that field educators certainly recognise the importance of teaching students how to translate their understanding of theory into a specific practice context. However, this appears to be a challenging negotiation that places field educators on the boundary, or margins, between two powerful systems: academia and practice.

### 6.1.2 Integrating Practice and Teaching

In addition to the negotiation involved in managing the integration of theory and practice, participants talked about advocating for the importance of field education. Persuading managers of the value of integrating teaching into practice environments was undertaken by participants in the face of significant time and workload pressures imposed by their social work practice.

Participants talked about the importance of promoting the role of field educator and suggested that if they did not do this then it would be unlikely that students would be offered placements in their team. Even as a manager, Stephanie said that she had to make the case for field education to her board members. She explained that they were resistant to the idea of her working with students and so she had to present this as a professional responsibility.

> *There was certainly a lot of resistance to students at a board level. Basically I just said, "Tough, this is what you do. If you're a social worker this is what you do" (Stephanie, Individual Interview Participant).*

Even in the context of a teaching hospital, Matthew described a process of working around his manager so that he could offer placements to students, a task that he understood to be a core part of his clinical work. It appears that several participants in this study had to be quite determined to work with students and willing to persevere in the face of resistance from team members and managers to ensure that placements were offered. It is likely that field educators lacking strong motivation to work with students would simply accept that it is too difficult to overcome these barriers.

One example of the barriers that field educators have to overcome is the organisational issues involved in planning field education. Ruth suggested that the administrative tasks associated with arranging a placement in her organisation were complex, and so she was

unsure if other colleagues would know what was required if she was unavailable. Mark made a similar comment, suggesting that it was easier to organise things himself because otherwise the process of arranging a placement would be slowed down. Time was also noted as a significant barrier to field education. Participants repeatedly mentioned the lack of time they had and the difficulty of managing their teaching responsibilities on top of their normal caseload. This was particularly highlighted as a theme during the focus groups when discussing possible strategies for the development of field education.

Participants talked about the need to convince their manager that field education was important. It appears that if they managed to do this then placements would be supported but a change of manager could lead to them no longer being offered. Research to date has indicated the significant impact that a lack of organisational support can have on field education (Bogo, 2006). Maidment's (2000b) research in Aotearoa also found that there can be a lack of interest in field education from managers unless there are significant concerns during the placement. The findings from the present study seem to echo this previous research. Field educators appear to be faced with a choice about whether to invest time and energy in persuading senior managers of the value of students and fighting for placements even when there is a lack of organisational support. This is more of a challenge in some contexts and less in others, and each field educator will respond in unique ways depending on their motivation to work with students. However, the overall picture indicates that field educators can experience marginalisation as they attempt to advocate for the value of working with students.

### 6.1.3 Integrating Practice and Learning

The third example of integrating the influence of education and practice relates to participants' descriptions of responding to requests from colleagues and directing which work would be appropriate for the student. Participants described their attempts to maintain a focus on learning in the face of demands from colleagues for students to contribute to practice. In the context of a placement, the field educator negotiates with their colleagues the tasks that the student can undertake and ensures that the student does not take on work without approval.

Anne gave an example of this negotiation when she described being asked by a colleague if a student could provide transport for a client and making a decision on the basis of the associated risks for the student.

> *With the student recently, somebody came to me, and said 'could this person go out on her own now, pick up this client and take her to a group?' And it was just a pick up, delivery, and she'd have a short conversation, but there was no health or safety issues around it. So I said yes, that would be okay (Anne, Individual Interview Participant).*

Several participants talked about students transporting clients or supervising access, and a number said they prevented students from being used too frequently for these tasks. Participants said that the pressure to allow students to engage in this kind of work was particularly strong when the team was short staffed. Lydia suggested that this pressure is greater in small teams where there are a limited number of people to undertake urgent work. Both Rebekah and Simeon said that the problem of limited staffing resources had led to frustration for their colleagues because they could not understand why a student could not be involved in certain work. Despite these pressures, participants described the importance of focusing on whether the tasks provided an opportunity for useful learning for the student, rather than whether the tasks themselves were appropriate or the team was short staffed. Field educators, therefore, had to provide guidance, both to colleagues and students, on a case-by-case basis, and they appeared to use either risk or learning goals as the decision-making criteria.

Participants talked about the need to educate their colleagues about what work is appropriate for a student. Kelly talked about a colleague who repeatedly asked for a student to cover for absent staff and she had to teach him that this would only be appropriate if it helped them meet their learning goals. Claire described a similar process of educating colleagues but from the perspective of the competence of the student, suggesting a concern for risks to clients, or the student themselves.

> *You have to educate the other staff around the limitations that is on a student and making sure that they're appropriate with it, and that's been a bit of a challenge at times for me (Claire, Individual Interview Participant).*

This kind of education was also referred to in relation to supervisory staff. Sarah commented that supervisors sometimes identified low-risk work as appropriate for

allocation to students and that she had to explain the need to link the task to the student's learning goals. These comments illustrate the combination of potential risk and appropriate learning as criteria used by field educators when negotiating with their colleagues about what work students will undertake. As noted by Claire, these negotiations could be challenging for participants, due to the marginal position of field educators within teams.

Participants also described the need to advise the student about the importance of integrating practice and learning objectives. Robert commented that although he was keen for students to shadow his colleagues in interesting work, he had to advise the student to check with him first because it may not be the best use of their time. Rebekah made a similar comment, suggesting that students can become competent enough to be useful to the team and then not extend their learning any further.

> *There's a risk, I think, that they can get to the point where they've got competencies and contributions they can make to the team and that's all they do - they stay at that level and they're not challenged. And the next thing you know the three months is up and they've missed opportunities (Rebekah, Individual Interview Participant).*

Rebekah's comments suggest that field educators are concerned with student learning more than simply utility for the team, which presumably might create tension with those colleagues primarily concerned with productivity. Sarah also commented on this idea in relation to a student who was concerned about completing work to the same intensity as paid staff. She advised the student that it was acceptable for him to take time to reflect and process his learning and that she had made other staff aware of this provision. The data suggested that some participants found themselves in the challenging situation of preventing a student from meeting the workload demands of the team. This highlights that field educators are placed in a marginalised position as they try to integrate the influence of practice and education so that students undertake appropriate learning tasks that also make a contribution to the team.

### 6.1.4 Integrating Learners and Teachers

The final example of managing the tension between education and practice that was evident in the interviews, related to deciding which colleagues a student should spend time working with. Participants described a process of connecting students with suitable

colleagues who would support learning. Moana described her efforts to introduce the student to the right people within her team to ensure a sense of belonging and support. She noted that she needed to be quite thoughtful about which people to connect the student to.

> *So I think you have to be a bit strategic about the people that you want that student to have a connection with (Moana, Individual Interview Participant).*

Zoe also argued that it was important to consider whether the practitioner would be a good role model before allowing a student to work with them. However, in contrast to this Anne appeared to encourage students to make their own decisions about which of her colleagues would be best to work with and she suggested students became quite skilled at making these judgements. Anne said that some of her colleagues could be self-conscious and reluctant to have a student shadow them and so she encouraged students to make the first move and approach her colleagues to see if there was suitable work to observe. Regardless of whether the field educator adopted a more active or passive approach to matching students with their colleagues, analysis of the interview data suggests that participants were concerned with how to negotiate relationships that would support learning.

There were also examples in the data of when this relationship went wrong. Simeon described a situation where there had been significant conflict between a student and his colleagues due to a culture of negativity about the value of students. He noted that he had contacted a colleague in another service to see if the student could spend some time with her to escape the difficult environment in his team. During a focus group discussion about developing bicultural field education, Martin suggested that his colleagues were significant parts of the teaching process but they may not model appropriate cultural practice. Once again this illustrates the challenge for field educators in actively matching students with other colleagues who will support the learning process.

These are interesting comments from participants because they demonstrate the importance of the relationship between the student and the wider team of professionals. Previous research has found that students value the relationship with their field educator and this is a major determinant of student satisfaction with field education (Bogo,

2006). However, the individual interviews in the present study appear to show that field educators are also concerned to manage the relationships between the student and other colleagues. Negotiating this integration of learners and teachers can place field educators in a marginal position within a team, as they seek to carefully manage relationships for the benefit of student learning.

### 6.1.5 Balancing Care and Independence

In addition to referring to the importance of student relationships with colleagues, several participants used language that suggested they developed a close caring relationship with students. Similar to the findings in Urdang's (1999) research, a strong sense of care and responsibility was implied when participants made reference to children or parenting during descriptions of their work with students. Sometimes this was an indirect link that involved a reference to parenting when talking about field education, without specifically describing their work in parental terms. For example, Anne talked about having a natural instinct to be an educator and suggested this partly originated in her experience as a parent. Martin also made an indirect link when talking about his passion for being an educator and explained this in terms of enjoying being with his children and teaching them. During a focus group, Joanne made reference to field education being like giving birth, something that people try to do better each time but actually are unable to control all the variables. Sometimes the connection with parenting was implied in the language used by the field educator without actually mentioning parents or children. Stephanie suggested that, one day, students would have to "fend for themselves" and Claire said that she did not hold students' hands or "baby them". These statements appear to borrow parenting language and analogies related to caring for children, even though the participants may not have explicitly compared field education with being a parent.

There were also examples of participants making a direct connection between parenting and field education. For example, Martin used the analogy of students being his children, implying a sense of care and responsibility for their welfare. Remi also said that he referred to students as his babies because they were learning how to be fully-grown social workers.

> *It's pushing them out the nest. I call them the 'bubbas' because they're 'bubba' social workers, they're just learning (Remi, Individual Interview Participant).*

Simeon made a direct link between parenting and field education when he talked about students as children needing protection. He also said that students needed to be pushed towards independence, again implying the importance of not treating them like babies but encouraging them to fend for themselves.

> *Usually they're [students] quite keen anyway, because they know they're there for a purpose, but giving them a little push is helpful too - but you've still got to watch them, the same as you would with kids, take them to the park but you don't let them wander into the trees by themselves (Simeon, Individual Interview Participant).*

This idea was also echoed in Michelle's comments about her experience that students learn the most when they are encouraged to take a risk. Luke also appeared to make a direct connection with parenting and encouraging independence. He suggested that as a field educator he did not want students to continuously remain like children, he wanted to celebrate when they became independent practitioners and took on the role of a colleague.

In each of these examples, there is a sense of care for students and also pride in seeing them develop their independence. Rachel talked about this pride even though she did not refer to the idea of students as children. She talked about her pride in seeing students once they had graduated and her pleasure when they returned to visit her at work. These sentiments again suggest an experience not dissimilar to that of parents whose children visit once they have moved out of home. The use of these parenting metaphors implies that field educators balance a sense of care for students with the use of benevolent control to promote increasing independence.

### 6.1.6 Balancing Protection and Control

In addition to the care implied in parenting language, the concept of protection was also frequently used by participants in relation to caring for students. The descriptions of protection provided during the interviews also included the implication that field educators were trying to control the behaviour of their colleagues to ensure student

safety or wellbeing. Participants talked about protecting students from higher risk tasks and unreasonable expectations. Anne described her concern that students should not be put in a position where they could be accused of inappropriateness or exposed to violent behaviour from clients. Claire gave an example of a student who had been left alone in a room with a caregiver who was threatening to assault a young person, and expressed her concern that the student should have been protected from this situation by other colleagues. Simeon also described a situation where his colleagues had told the clients in a residential environment that they did not need to listen to the student, potentially exposing the student to aggressive and violent behaviour. Sarah said that she had adopted a protective approach with students because she had observed other field educators ignoring the risks involved in certain aspects of the team's work.

> *I think that with some of the [field educators], they let their students just go out kind of co-working in quite an ad hoc approach. Whereas I've always felt really protective of my students because I have witnessed in the past students going out on criticals [crisis intervention work], which is just utterly ridiculous (Sarah, Individual Interview Participant).*

Participants suggested that some students were more confident than others and so required less protection. However, Robert said that more competent students needed to be protected from being overwhelmed by requests from the team to complete tasks to support their colleagues. Rebekah made reference to the same idea and said that her role was both to protect the student and also to help them protect themselves.

> *I felt a need to perhaps protect the student or help them protect themselves so that they didn't just become the person who could jump in and do this, that and the other thing (Rebekah, Individual Interview Participant).*

Zoe also talked about her experience of students being pushed too far by a team and expected to take on more complex work than they were ready for. She suggested that students could be like "rabbits in headlights", unsure of how to respond to the demands coming their way. Participants gave several examples of protecting students from the expectations and demands of the team. Claire also talked about trying to keep students insulated from inappropriate feedback from members of the team, and from witnessing poor social work practice. Claire seemed to imply that these challenges were part of the

reality of social work practice, but that she wanted to ensure students did not have a negative experience that could result in them choosing to exit the profession.

Part of a social work role is to advocate for the marginalised or oppressed in society, and this may explain the focus on protecting students described by participants. However, it also indicates the pressure on field educators and the potential for them to be marginalised as they try to control their colleagues' behaviour in an attempt to protect students. Although some practitioners may be untroubled by this dynamic, for others it can create a sense of pressure and result in a lack of energy for the challenge of developing practice.

In addition to protecting students, participants talked about the ways they protected clients by managing if and when students should work with them. Participants implied that they were concerned about the impact of students on clients. Claire suggested that she focused on this issue from the beginning of selecting a student, making sure that they would not pose a risk to vulnerable clients. Rebekah also said that she would not send a student into a situation that they were not yet competent to manage due to the potential harm that could be caused to the client.

> *You just wouldn't send somebody out into a situation that they're not prepared to deal with and it's gonna be a nasty experience, and there's a potential that some harm may come to the client because they might blow it, they might freak out and run. I guess as a fieldwork educator, that I take that responsibility to try and match that up (Rebekah, Individual Interview Participant).*

Lydia provided other examples of tasks that she would not allow students to undertake because it would be abusive to clients. She noted that she would not allow students to interview clients on their own and would not take two students to a family group conference. Rachel suggested that client safety came before the learning needs of students and that she determined whether it was safe for students to have access to certain clients. This concern for client welfare appeared to lead field educators to exercise control over students, despite their enthusiasm to undertake certain tasks.

Participants also talked about playing a part in deciding which students should graduate and therefore have access to clients as a qualified social worker. This was a long-term focus but still appeared related to protecting clients from harm. Anne explained that she

had challenged the academic institution about the quality of the students being sent to her because she believed they lacked the basic competence to be safe to work with clients. Stephanie commented that academic institutions could be obstructive when a field educator felt that a student had not demonstrated appropriate competence and that this led to practitioners being disinclined to fail a student because of the subsequent problems in justifying that decision. The interview data suggested that field educators at times felt unsupported by both the academic institution and their employer when they were attempting to protect future clients from a student they believed should not graduate from their professional education.

Participants in this study described the care they demonstrated by protecting both students and clients. However, this focus on protection also appeared to involve exercising a degree of control, either over colleagues' behaviour or over students. This suggests that field educators make decisions about how to balance protection and control, each adopting a unique approach. The need to protect students varies depending on the level of support from colleagues and the nature of the work. Protecting clients is also a more significant issue depending on the nature of their difficulties and also the attributes of the student. Therefore, field educators respond to a dynamic context and also make individual decisions based on their perception of the importance of protection or control.

### 6.1.7 Abuse of Authority

Although participants talked about balancing protection and control, they also gave examples of the abuse of power by field educators. Field educators are authority figures to students, and this can result in power struggles (Schwaber Kerson, 1994). Gair and Thomas (2008) found that a quarter of students on placement feel intimidated by the power imbalance with their field educator and a significant number experience bullying. Zuchowski (2013, 2015b) suggests that this is one reason why external supervision may be beneficial, providing a space to discuss safety concerns. The descriptions of inappropriate expressions of power and control given by participants were either stories from their own placements or observations of other practitioners. The fact that participants did not provide examples from their own practice is possibly an indication of social desirability bias because I was known to participants as one of the field education co-ordinators responsible for making decisions about whether they would work with students.

Sometimes, the presence of a power differential in field education was implied by the participant. For example, Rachel talked about adopting a team approach to field education so that the student did not feel that they were "owned by one person". Although she did not provide a specific example of the inappropriate use of power by a field educator, the decision to develop a team approach appears to have been related to this potential in traditional one-to-one placements. Luke talked about his own experience on placement and used military language to describe being pushed into situations that he was ill-prepared for.

> *I think it was more like cannon fodder, like anybody here, they've got to sink or swim. It's a cold, harsh environment (Luke, Individual Interview Participant).*

Apparently, Luke accepted this situation at the time and did not challenge the way his field educator was framing his role. Anne also talked about her own experience as a student and said that the physical environment reinforced her weak position as a student. She explained that she had been put in a room in the basement with no windows and been given very little work, actions that she understood as a clear statement of her limited value. Although Anne could have raised concerns about this situation she clearly felt powerless to do so.

Martin talked about the powerless position of students and the difficulty for them in raising concerns if there were problems in the placement. He went on to say that if a field educator became offended then they could create some significant problems for the student due to the power and control that they are able to exert over the student.

> *If their [field educator] decides to take it personally, it could be really difficult for the [field liaison] to identify how those – the power control thing, where the [field educator] can do whatever, make it they [the student] should do whatever, just take a piece of him to have a go at him or whatever. I just feel that there's room for [field educators] to do some nasty things (Martin, Individual Interview Participant).*

It is unsurprising that there were only a limited number of participants who talked about their role in terms of power and control since they would be unlikely to present themselves as operating in this kind of way with their students. Furthermore, the interviews were not focused on specifically asking participants to discuss these issues.

However, the examples that were provided illustrate that field educators are in a powerful position in relation to students and that this power can be abused. Given the overwhelming impression that participants in this research were concerned for the wellbeing of students and clients, one explanation for the examples of power being abused would be that these were stories of field educators who had become overwhelmed by trying to balance the competing influences in field education and were used to moderate the behaviour of other practitioners.

## 6.2 Monoculturalism and Biculturalism

The concept of culture can be used to describe the patterns of behaviour, norms and symbolic structures within any community or social group, for example: ethnicity, gender, sexuality or age. I did not specifically set out to explore the influence of any predetermined factors on field education but a critical-pragmatist lens sensitised me to the power dynamics identified by participants. The relative influence of Māori and Pākehā culture on field education was referred to by interview participants and appeared to be an example of how power dynamics impact practice. Apparent monoculturalism in the practice of field educators is a pertinent illustration of how the marginalisation of field educators maintains contradictions in the activity system and inhibits transformational learning.

Unfortunately, field education can be an experience of racism and oppression for indigenous students (Gair, Miles, Savage, & Zuchowski, 2015; Zuchowski et al., 2014) and Clark et al. (2010) have argued that "field instructors need to interrogate the oppressive policies and practices that continue to perpetuate Eurocentric practices" (p. 22). A unique feature of social work practice in Aotearoa is the importance given to forging a bicultural partnership between Māori and Pākehā. Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the founding constitutional document for Aotearoa and the social work profession has sought to embed the treaty principles of partnership, participation and protection into the operation of the professional body (ANZASW, n.d.). Ruwhiu (2009) argues that Māori concepts of wellbeing should be essential components of social work practice in Aotearoa. Concepts from te ao Māori have indeed been increasingly influential and incorporated into the development of social work practice (Munford & Sanders, 2011). In addition, social workers in Aotearoa must develop their understanding of Māori perspectives and work against mono-cultural approaches if they are to practice ethically (ANZASW, 2015). Te Tiriti o Waitangi and bicultural practice are now required

subjects in social work education (SWRB, 2016a) and practitioners must demonstrate competence to work with Māori before they can become registered. Bicultural practice is an unavoidable imperative within the social work profession in Aotearoa.

Despite the evident importance of bicultural practice in Aotearoa, analysis of the individual interviews revealed an absence of references to the influence of kaupapa Māori models of field education. One explanation for this absence could be that the individual interviews did not include a specific question about bicultural practice or kaupapa Māori models of teaching and learning. I decided to address this gap in the focus groups and specifically enquired about the influence of bicultural practice. One of the interesting observations made during the debrief discussions with the research assistant involved in the focus groups was that the question about the influence of kaupapa Māori approaches often resulted in an extended pause in the discussion. It appeared as though participants were unsure about how to respond, or felt awkward about offering their views. However, once one participant offered an initial opinion, each group had a lively discussion about the topic. It became clear through these conversations that participants were aware of the importance of bicultural field education but that significant development of practice would be required if meaningful expressions of kaupapa Māori pedagogy were to become commonplace during student placements.

### 6.2.1 Awareness

Participants in this research were aware of the importance of bicultural practice in field education and acknowledged the requirement for students to have an opportunity to develop this area of competence. At the same time, participants in the focus groups noted that each field educator is influenced by their own experience and level of awareness of te ao Māori. Nigel suggested that field educators will naturally practise from a default cultural perspective and that incorporating indigenous perspectives would require a conscious effort on the part of some practitioners.

> *When you're thinking that the student, fieldwork thing, you just go almost to your defaults or something, and if that's Pākehā, then that's just how you do it. You don't think about it. Unless you've got deeply bicultural…you probably don't weave it in naturally. It has to be a conscious effort to say, okay, I want to be bicultural in this (Nigel, Focus Group 2 Participant).*

However, other participants talked about their personal journey towards an increased understanding of Māori culture. Ruth said that she had completed a course in tikanga[20] Māori and this had helped her to understand the importance of appreciating the collective nature of Māori culture and the need for taking time to build relational connections. Rachel also talked about her recent engagement in a te reo Māori course and noted that this had led to her taking time to connect with a student in relation to her culture.

> *Because of my individual learning that's happening, that changes the way I've related to her [Māori student] (Rachel, Focus Group 4 Participant).*

Several participants in the individual interviews also had experience of delivering social work from a Māori perspective. Claire had worked in a bilingual residential service for young people. She described how this experience had influenced her approach to social work when she transferred to another agency, incorporating karakia and waiata into daily practice with young people. Another experienced participant, Kelly, talked about the bicultural practice approach used in her agency and the challenge this presented for students when completing a placement with her. Participants in the focus groups noted that these kinds of experiences would be likely to result in some field educators being more aware than others of ways to incorporate te ao Māori into their work with students.

A Māori participant in the individual interviews talked about how she had mentored a young social work practitioner who was completing a Māori leadership programme within a statutory agency. Moana identified this role as evidence of her love for mentoring, teaching and guiding others but unfortunately did not provide further information about her approach when working with this Māori social worker. Since this mentoring relationship involved two Māori practitioners working within a specifically Māori leadership programme, it would be reasonable to assume that Moana adopted an approach to mentoring and coaching that was informed by a Māori worldview. It is likely that this experience also informed Moana's approach to working with students on

[20] Correct procedure, custom, protocol.

placement, although it was not possible to demonstrate this connection from the interview data.

Participants in this research came from a variety of backgrounds and with a range of experience of te ao Māori. Some participants had engaged in professional development activities that had increased their awareness of how to practice in bicultural ways. Ruth suggested that the aim for social workers was to develop a level of confidence so that Māori approaches became an integral part of all practice, whilst recognising that this will not be the case for all practitioners.

> *It becomes part of the fabric of your work, not an add-on, but for some people it will be [an add-on] (Ruth, Focus Group 4 Participant).*

### 6.2.2 Creativeness

Participants in the individual interviews made reference to the challenge of providing opportunities for students to engage with bicultural practice in meaningful ways due to the culture within their agency. Robert offered a critique of bicultural practice within his work context, suggesting that tokenism was often evident. However, he also noted that he had seen examples of social workers being very responsive to the needs of Māori in other work settings. This same problem was noted by Karla in a focus group discussion when she suggested that staff in many organisations would not be able to articulate how bicultural practice is evident in their work.

> *It's hardly surprising [that the influence of Māori knowledge on field education was infrequently mentioned in the individual interviews]. Most agencies wouldn't even have a clue how they're practising biculturally anyway. I'm really not surprised by that (Karla, Focus Group 2 Participant).*

The challenge of working in an agency that struggled with bicultural practice was also mentioned by Nigel in the same focus group. He said that he tried to meet his obligation to demonstrate culturally appropriate practice but that this was limited due to it not being at the core of practice within the agency.

> *We certainly make efforts and keep to the practice standards and all that stuff, but in terms of actually really revving it up, it's not really at the base of what we do (Nigel, Focus Group 2 Participant).*

Martin talked about the same issue in his individual interview, but he had turned this problem into a useful learning exercise by examining with students whether the practice within his agency actually reflected the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. He commented that the family group conference approach is often identified as being an example of practice based on the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, but he challenged students to critically analyse practice and consider whether more could be done to demonstrate bicultural principles in authentic ways. Despite the challenges presented by some work contexts, participants were clear about the requirement to engage students in learning about bicultural practice and were using creative methods to achieve this objective.

During the focus groups, the discussions about the influence of indigenous knowledge generally began with references to bicultural social work practice and the challenge of providing appropriate learning opportunities for students. Participants said that they sometimes did not have Māori clients that students could work with, suggesting that learning about bicultural practice was impossible without Māori clients in the agency context. For example, Nicola said that it was often necessary to go outside of the team context to find an opportunity for students to be exposed to indigenous models of practice, due to the limited number of Māori clients on her caseload. Participants discussed the creative ways that they responded to this problem. For example, Kate explained her approach to helping students learn about bicultural practice by using reflection exercises. She described asking students to reflect on a case and then identify what they would have done differently if the client had been Māori.

Another solution to the challenge of teaching students about bicultural practice was to identify ways that this competence could be demonstrated with all clients. Each focus group made reference to the idea that bicultural practice involved the use of both indigenous and western knowledge with all clients, not only those who identified themselves as Māori. Karla made reference to this idea in the second focus group, suggesting that the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi: partnership, protection and participation, should not only be applied when working with Māori but should be evident in all practice.

> *I had a light-bulb moment in my year three placement where I was talking to a lady on placement and she was making me understand the three Ps of the Treaty and how do you do a practice that can be seen and viewed and it*

> *doesn't have to be a brown way of doing things, but you can see partnership in the ways that you work (Karla, Focus Group 2 Participant).*

There was general agreement that it was possible for students to develop their skills in bicultural practice without actually working with Māori clients. This is an example of the creativity demonstrated by participants as they attempted to provide the learning opportunities that they knew students required to develop cultural competence.

### 6.2.3 Implicitness

In each focus group where a specific question about bicultural practice was explored, it was necessary to ask a follow-up question about the implications for the participants' approach to teaching and learning. Participants generally began by talking about providing students with exposure to bicultural models and encouraging them to critically analyse practice. However, participants did not automatically identify the influence of Māori knowledge on their own approach to teaching and learning. When prompted to reflect in this way, some participants talked about bicultural practice being interwoven into their practice in unspoken ways. Karla talked about this idea, suggesting that deep analysis of field educators' practice would identify examples of treaty-based principles, but suggested this is not always evident on the surface.

> *If you actually look deeper, I think it's probably there. They're working in partnership with the students; they're participating in the role. I think if you went down to that level of the soil you could say yes it's there. But we don't always see it (Karla, Focus Group 2 Participant).*

In another focus group, Helen suggested that bicultural practice is inherent in the approach that field educators adopt with students even if practitioners did not identify a specific model informing their actions. She suggested that field educators use holistic approaches when working with students, exploring spirituality and wellbeing as well as academic learning, and that this was evidence of a Māori perspective. Martin also suggested that field educators were demonstrating bicultural practice on an everyday basis even if they did not identify it as being based on Te Tiriti o Waitangi. He went on to say that he did not think that culturally sensitive practice was something complicated or unrealised, that needed to be aspired to, but was actually something evident in all of practice.

> *Everyday things that you do are actually fulfilling the principles of the treaty. So I don't think the treaty and the principles and being culturally respectful is not something utopic, is not something that you have to do a Ph.D. for, it's something that we do every day. I don't see why we should aim for that (Martin, Focus Group 4 Participant).*

Although not all participants referred to the idea of bicultural practice being innate to field education, it was mentioned in each focus group and no participants challenged this presentation of bicultural field education. It is unclear whether the idea that bicultural practice is routine was a defensive reaction to the suggestion that te ao Māori was not influencing field educator practice, or if this thinking was part of how social workers generally understand their cultural competence. Regardless of the explanation, if this mono-cultural view is widespread then it raises significant concerns for the development of field educator practice, possibly suggesting the operation of oppression at individual and cultural levels. The idea that bicultural practice simply means working in partnership with the student, or adopting holistic approaches that consider spirituality or wellbeing, could potentially act as a barrier to practitioners engaging with Māori models of field education, or teaching and learning. If culturally informed field education is commonplace then there would be no need to investigate specific Māori models or seek ways to transform current approaches. Perhaps this dynamic could explain why participants did not appear to be critically reflecting on the influence of te ao Māori in their approach to working with students. This dynamic is an example of field educators seeking to manage their authority to define the cultural influences on their practice with their responsibility to incorporate bicultural principles into their work.

### 6.2.4 Bicultural Models

The idea of bicultural approaches to field educator practice appeared to be one that the focus group participants had not previously considered. Nigel commented that he had never heard of a Māori model of field education. Kate also reflected that she had never looked at a Māori model of practice and thought about how she might apply the principles in field education. These comments are perhaps unsurprising given the lack of literature specifically addressing Māori models of field education. Despite the fact that Herewini and Gray (1999) discussed culturally appropriate ways of delivering field education almost twenty years ago, there has been a lack of further research and

development in this field. Whilst participants in this present study clearly recognised the importance of supporting students to meet the SWRB competence standards in relation to working with Māori, they would have had some difficulty in identifying literature that might help them to develop a bicultural approach to field education. Even if a social worker attended the bicultural field education training programme discussed by Sheehan and Jansen (2006), this may not provide the practitioner with Māori-specific ways of approaching the teaching and learning exchange, since the curriculum content was no different than the non-Māori course. Ward's (2006) discussion of bicultural field education might also be discounted by field educators since it focuses on the role of field education co-ordinators rather than field educators themselves. Therefore, it could be argued that this lack of literature specifically focused on bicultural field education might explain why the practice of field educators has not been more informed by te ao Māori.

Although there is limited literature that specifically addresses the topic of bicultural practice for field educators, it could be argued that the available recommendations for bicultural ways of working with students on placement should be familiar to practitioners. Smart and Gray (2000) argue that field educators must consider how to address issues related to individualism, spirituality, extended family and boundaries, when working with Māori students, all of which should be familiar concerns for social workers. Ward's (2006) suggestion to consider students within the context of their network of relationships, both within the academic environment and at home, clearly applies to field educators even though the article was written about field education co-ordinators. This suggestion for a collectivist perspective would not be an unfamiliar idea for practitioners working with Māori and could be considered a ubiquitous idea in social work. The use of te reo Māori and tikanga (Herewini & Gray, 1999) might also be considered basic requirements for culturally appropriate practice. Even slightly more nuanced Māori concepts, such as wairua[21], aroha[22], awhi[23], tika[24] and mana[25] (Ward,

[21] Spirit, soul of a person.

[22] Affection, compassion, empathy.

[23] Embracing, caring, supporting.

[24] Truth, correctness, fairness.

[25] Prestige, authority, control, influence, status.

2006) would all be familiar to social workers in Aotearoa. The findings in the current research do not demonstrate that these concepts are not being applied by field educators in their practice with students, as this is beyond the scope of this investigation. However, analysis of the data does suggest that field educators do not consciously identify these cultural approaches as informing their work. It appears that there is a need for a professional conversation that leads to an increased identification of the ways in which te ao Māori might inform the future development of field education pedagogy.

During three of the focus groups, it appeared that the discussion about the influence of indigenous knowledge acted as a catalyst for participants identifying Māori models of practice that could be applied to field education. Cathy made a connection to the *Tuituia* assessment framework (Ministry for Vulnerable Children Oranga Tamariki, 2013) used by the statutory child protection services in Aotearoa. Ruth specifically mentioned *Te Whare Tapa Wha* (Durie, 1998) and the *Meihana* model (Pitama et al., 2007) as bicultural approaches that could be applied to field education. One participant who had transferred to a lecturing role since being a field educator specifically made a connection to teaching and learning concepts informed by te ao Māori during the discussion about indigenous influences in field education. Jessica referred to the principle of ako, which emphasises the reciprocity and fluidity of the roles of teacher and learner (Sheehan & Jansen, 2006), and the concept of tuakana[26] teina[27], in which a less experienced child learns from a more experienced sibling (Smith, 2007), as applicable to field education. Participants in several focus groups acknowledged the need for the development of bicultural approaches to field education and suggested that increasing the interaction between practitioners could lead to this kind of initiative. Indeed, it appears that creating an opportunity within the focus groups to explore the question of bicultural field education acted as a catalyst for the realisation that developmental work was both possible and warranted. The generation of this new thinking within the focus group process suggests the potential to use a group process in the future to promote developmental thinking in field education.

[26] Elder brother, elder sister.

[27] Younger brother, younger sister.

### 6.2.5 Development of Bicultural Field Education

Although it is concerning that participants did not identify Māori models that informed their practice, it is possible that this simply illustrates the lack of engagement of field educators in the development of new approaches to field education. A Māori model of field education might be considered innovative practice at the present time, perhaps unlikely to emerge without the active engagement of field educators. It is likely that if focus groups had been conducted specifically with Māori field educators, particularly those working in kaupapa Māori services, then they would have identified indigenous approaches to field education. However, this was beyond the scope of the research since I was not trying to identify a Māori model of field education but rather to identify whether indigenous knowledge was generally informing field educator practice. Analysis of the data from the focus groups suggests that indigenous knowledge about teaching and learning in practice settings was not significantly influencing the way that participants practised field education.

Zuchowski et al. (2013) have highlighted the need for developments in field education that will result in the decolonisation of practice. They suggest that this transformation of field education will require additional education for field educators but also indigenous role models for students. Herewini and Gray (1999) highlight the importance of Māori professionals being involved in all of the key roles within field education. This principle indicates the importance of Māori being engaged in the development of bicultural models of field education. Such developments also require policy and managerial support for change to be realised (Sheehan & Jansen, 2006), but Māori practitioners themselves have a key role to play in transforming practice. These kinds of developments have been evident in the area of cultural supervision in recent years and Māori practitioners have developed a number of models specifically informed by te ao Māori. An early example of cultural supervision developed by Webber-Dreadon (1999) draws on seven principles from te ao Māori: karanga, karakia, mihimihi, whanaungatanga, whakapapa kōrero, take, karakia and kai. King's (2014) cultural supervision model is complementary but informed by different Māori principles: kōrero, ira atua - ira tangata, ako, oranga, rangatiratanga and ahurutanga. Work by Lipsham (2012) on the importance of respectful relationships and Murray's (2012) proposals for the use of ancestral sites highlight further ways in which te ao Māori can inform supervision practice. Each of these examples illustrate the engagement of Māori social work supervisors in the development of cultural supervision models and highlight that

there are numerous ways in which te ao Māori can inform professional practice. These initiatives highlight the potential for similar developments in field education, led by Māori practitioners but also working in partnership with other field educators.

Participants in the focus groups indicated their interest in developing bicultural field education practice. Interestingly, both Ruth and Rebekah noted that students often have a more developed understanding of bicultural practice, and field educators can learn from this knowledge. Helen suggested that it would be useful if there was an organisation co-ordinating training for field educators so that practitioners could request specialist education about Māori models of practice. In contrast, Kate suggested a more practitioner-led approach involving forums to discuss practice and reflect on areas for development such as bicultural field education. Angela explained that the need to increase the focus on bicultural practice had already been identified in her organisation and she had begun working with a Māori practitioner to develop specific learning experiences focused on cultural competence standards.

Although the interest in developing bicultural field education models is encouraging, participants also identified some of the potential barriers. Amy commented on the lack of management support for cultural practises in her context and the need for her to continue to use karakia and waiata surreptitiously. Rebekah noted that any initiatives would require management support and Martin also commented on the impact that others in the team can have on the development of bicultural practice. In addition to management support, a second barrier identified by participants was that of time. Kate said that her proposals for change were offered “tongue in cheek” because she did not know where the time would come from to implement the ideas. Analysis of the focus group data indicated that participants would be willing to be part of the development of practice, but their experience of marginalisation related to a lack of management support and time may prevent that from being practical. This illustrates the tension created as field educators seek to balance the influence of practice and education.

## 6.3 Implications

Having completed an inductive analysis of the individual interviews, I identified two themes that were not captured by the activity theory analysis. Firstly, field educators’ experience of marginalisation was evident. Participants described aspects of their role that required strong negotiation skills and suggested their marginal position in relation

to education institutions and practice agencies. Field educators explained their focus on translating academic requirements into practice settings, trying to rationalise two different sets of objectives. Participants also talked about advocating for field education in their work settings, arguing that offering placements would be of value despite the time and workload implications. The theme of integrating learning and practice continued with participants describing negotiation with colleagues and students to agree the work or people that would be beneficial for learning. These examples of integrating the influence of education and practice illustrate the demands on field educators if they are to maintain a focus on student learning rather than the dominant agendas around them. In addition to these challenges, I also identified a second theme related to power dynamics at a personal level. Participants talked about their work using language related to parenting and protection, suggesting tasks related to balancing the influence of care or control. Whilst these descriptions generally emphasised caring for others, they also implied the potential for the inappropriate use of power, an idea that some participants talked about in terms of their experience or observation. Although these descriptions indicate the potential for field educators to abuse their position, the overall picture highlights the demands of field education and the need for resilience and determination. These requirements suggest further potential for resistance to change as a result of some field educators being overwhelmed with the challenge of the power dynamics in their work.

The apparent monoculturalism in field education is a clear illustration of the impact of these two power-related themes. Participants talked about the importance of arranging learning experiences for students that addressed the competence standard for working with Māori. However, there were no references made to a bicultural approach to field education practice that might be informed by te ao Māori. This absence was specifically addressed in the focus groups. Once again, participants talked about the creative strategies that they used to address the need for students to learn about bicultural social work practice. However, although participants suggested that Māori perspectives and the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi were woven into everyday field education practice, they did not identify any indigenous models of teaching and learning or field education that were informing their work with students. This disconnect suggests the maintenance of oppression at personal and cultural levels. Interestingly, the discussion in the focus groups appeared to act as a catalyst for new thinking and participants began to make connections to some of the Māori models of practice they were familiar with.

Participants demonstrated an interest in engaging in a developmental process to address the apparent monoculturalism in their practice. However, they also pointed out the barriers that would prevent them from participating in this kind of initiative, particularly time and workload pressures. This problem suggests the marginalised position of field educators due to the lack of value placed on field education in some organisations. Despite an interest in developing their practice, field educators may struggle to engage with this work due to the psychological impact of feeling disempowered by the demands of their role. In Chapter 7 I explore the role of field educators as a community that might empower to practitioners so that they can overcome the challenges of their role.

# 7 Field Educator Community

In this chapter, I explore the influence of the collective of professionals involved in field education. To begin with, I revisit each of the tensions identified in Chapter 5, from the perspective of a collective. I consider the tension specifically related to the community node of the field education activity system in light of the attributes of a community of practice. I then explore the role of the company of field educators in relation to their influence on the objectives, rules and tools of field education. I conclude this section with a brief consideration of the role of the community in developing bicultural models of practice. I then present a conceptual model of field education that describes the relationship between the collective of field educators and various influences on their practice. My discussion then moves to an exploration of the findings from the focus group interviews that point to the potential for transformation in the activity system. I explore the possibility of developing a stronger sense of participation in a field educator community of practice, through professional learning groups, mentors and online support. I also discuss the importance of education, recognition and partnership to place field educators in the context of related groups of professionals.

The idea that people are part of creating community as they engage in object-oriented activity is an important component of activity theory (Taylor, 2009). The community node is one of three dimensions that Engeström (1987) adds onto Leont'ev's original model of mediated activity. He also argues that activity systems have within themselves the seeds of contradiction and it is these tensions that push the system beyond a bias

towards equilibrium into the arena of potential for transformation. The purpose of using activity theory as a heuristic tool in this research was to help identify sites of tension that might result in expansive learning in field education. I discussed a number of tensions within the activity of field education in Chapter 5 and in each of these examples there were significant connections to the community node in the activity system. The community node in an activity system denotes those individuals collectively engaged in the activity (Engeström, 1987). When I began this research I had thought of the challenge for field educators as making the transition from one community context (social work practice), to another (social work education). From the perspective of situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), this might be conceptualised as an individual learning process, moving from the periphery of the educator community through a process of increasing engagement and competence in the practice of valued tasks. However, activity theory lifts the perspective from the individual process of learning to be a field educator, to the role of the community in the transformation of practice (Arnseth, 2008). Adopting activity theory as a lens brought into focus the fact that field educators are already engaged in a community regardless of how functional it might be considered from any particular perspective. Although the concept of community often implies harmonious working relations between participants, communities also exist that are weak, ineffective or self-defeating (Jewson, 2007). The apparent infrequency of interview participants identifying themselves as belonging to a collective that might take action to resolve the challenges that they faced in their practice, possibly indicates a dormant community rather than the complete absence of a collective. This analysis suggests the potential to stimulate action within the field educator community to catalyse change, an endeavour where the concept of a community of practice might prove instructive. Due to the epistemological foundations of this research, namely, pragmatism and activity theory, I took intervention and action to be an integral part of the process of acquiring knowledge (Menand, 1997; Miettinen, 2006). For this reason, I engaged focus group participants in conversations about how the field educator community might collectively respond to some of the challenges identified in the individual interviews.

## 7.1 Community Disconnection

Although it was common for participants in this study to say that they undertook their role in isolation, there were instances of support being provided by other field

educators. Many participants practised in organisations where there were other field educators available for mutual support and descriptions of the guidance and assistance they received in both small and large organisations were provided. Participants also gave examples of supporting students collaboratively and sharing learning resources with other field educators. Michelle commented that she had been able to ask other experienced field educators in her workplace for advice and guidance, and had learnt a lot about field education from observation. Due to a positive experience of peer learning, Luke suggested that he would find it much more helpful to learn about field education by participating in a peer learning group of some kind. Peer learning methods have indeed been shown to be effective in several studies with field educators (e.g. Barlow et al., 2004; Bogo & Power, 1995; Douglas & Magee, 2012; Finch & Feigelman, 2008) and have been used in Canterbury, Aotearoa in the context of developing research-focused placements (Maidment et al., 2011).

Despite these positive examples of peer support, several participants described their isolation from other field educators even in large organisations with several colleagues who provided placements. Practitioners talked about seeking support from other field educators and finding a general lack of interest. This was a point of frustration and Mark indicated that he would value more interaction with colleagues rather than develop his pedagogical approach alone.

> *So I work out my own way of what I think's helpful for a student, but it would be useful to talk with others and say, 'this is what I'm doing', you know, and others say, 'oh, um, what about this though', or 'have you thought about . . . ' (Mark, Individual Interview Participant).*

Some participants suggested that the level of disconnection between field educators had increased over time, particularly in comparison to when 'student units' were used in Canterbury. The student unit was a model of field education that involved one field educator supporting a group of students undertaking placements either within one large organisation, or sometimes across a group of smaller agencies. Participants described this model as more collaborative, offering more supportive contact between field educators and social workers mentoring students in an agency. The student unit model was disestablished over time due to funding cuts and a more individualised approach became the dominant field education model (Beddoe, 1999). Although participants may have been responding to a fond memory suggesting better days, the descriptions of

student units do suggest a genuine desire for a greater sense of participation with other field educators.

The isolation between field educators was confirmed in the focus group interviews. Participants in the fifth focus group were all from smaller non-government organisations and they discussed their experience of being isolated from other field educators. Jessica made a comparison between her role as a field educator and her experience of being a social work educator and a social work practitioner. She commented that, in her experience of both these roles, close connection with colleagues was normal, but that in field education this was not the case.

> *When you're in teaching . . . you have all these people who are doing it as well and you've got all these courses that you can do. When you're in practice as a social worker [you're] with other social workers and you've done your training and do professional development. There's not really anything for you when you're teaching field education, is there? (Jessica, Focus Group 5 Participant).*

During a discussion about professional isolation in the first focus group, Matthew suggested that practitioners may in fact intentionally avoid contact with other field educators because of a sense of uncertainty about whether they are working with students in the correct way. He suggested that to avoid embarrassment about not being able to articulate the basis of their pedagogy, field educators prefer to adopt an individualistic approach.

> *I wonder if there's a bit of people operating by themselves because they're a bit whakamā[28] about things. I don't know if that's the right word, but a bit hesitant because they know what they're doing, but that sense of being exposed a bit, when someone asks you a tricky question. So what theories inform how you go about being a field educator? What do you draw on? What do you do? I think they kind of go, well, there might be lots of intuitive stuff that they know and experiential stuff, but actually they might, in terms of articulating that, feel a bit . . . I wonder if sometimes it's easier to be, you*

[28] To be ashamed, shy, bashful, embarrassed.

*do it how you do it, and everyone does how they do it (Matthew, Focus Group 1 Participant).*

These findings are concerning from the perspective of the professional socialisation of field educators. Barretti (2004a) argues convincingly that professionals learn from their colleagues and so a dislocation from other practitioners is likely to inhibit the development of field educators. The reports of isolation from participants in this study suggest a tension related to the community node within the activity system of field education. The community of field educators could potentially be a significant source of learning for practitioners, and indeed transformation of the activity system. Whilst there is some evidence in the data that support was provided in certain contexts, this does not appear to have been a consistent experience. Participants in this study frequently described their experience of disconnection and isolation from other field educators. The tension within the community of field educators is illustrated in Figure 7-1, along with the uncertainty about the division of labour related to field educators supporting each other.

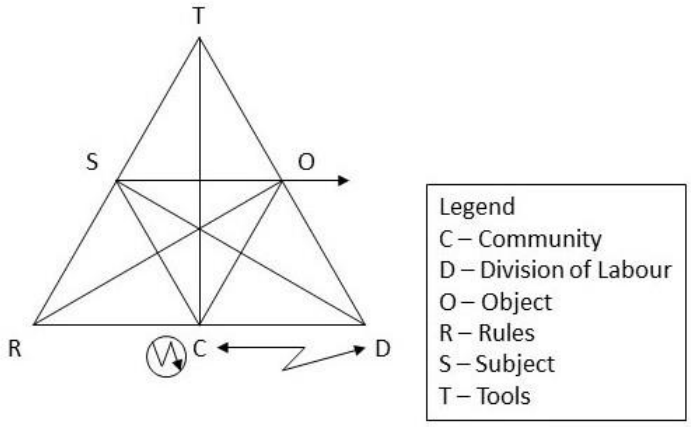


***Figure 7-1: Tension between the community and the division of labour in field education.***

The zigzag arrow enclosed in a circle in Figure 7-1 indicates the presence of tension within the community node of the activity system due to the isolation experienced by field educators. The jagged arrow between the community and division of labour nodes also indicates a tension due to the uncertainty about responsibility to provide collegial support.

The descriptions of isolation provided by participants in this research suggest the absence of a community of practice. Wenger (1998) suggests that practice occurs when

people engage in activity and negotiate the meaning of their actions between each other. He argues that practice involves three ingredients, 'mutual engagement', a 'joint enterprise' and a 'shared repertoire'. The mutual engagement of community members does not necessitate homogeneity, in fact, Wenger (1998) suggests that there may be conflict. However, it is necessary for participants in a community of practice to participate in interpersonal activity over a sustained period. "Given the right context, talking on the phone, exchanging electronic mail, or being connected by radio can all be part of what makes mutual engagement possible" (Wenger, 1998, p. 74). Although a variety of flexible methods can be used to achieve mutual engagement, in the case of field education, it appears that this basic marker of a community of practice is absent. Participants in this research described their lack of contact with other field educators, whether in person or through electronic communication. From the perspective of situated learning theory, this absence of mutual engagement might be taken to indicate that a community of practice does not exist (Fuller, 2007). However, from the alternative perspective of activity theory, even apparently solitary activity, in fact, has a social dimension (Engeström, 1999). Therefore, the findings in this present research may simply indicate a weakness in the community to sustain the activity system rather than the absence. Adopting a perspective informed by history, the data suggests that the tension within the community node of the activity system may have increased over time. This indicates that the necessary conditions might exist for a collective response to the isolation of field educators, leading to the transformation of field education. The question of how to catalyse increasing mutual engagement is therefore pertinent, and it became a topic of discussion within the focus groups that I discuss later in this chapter.

## 7.2 Community Influence on the Object

As I discussed in Chapter 5 analysis of the interviews with field educators also suggested a tension between the object of social work practice and social work education in relation to students. On the one hand, participants described the value of students to workplace settings as a workforce resource, whilst on the other, they described the education institutions' emphasis on student learning as an object regardless of the production value for the organisation. Kaptelinin (2005) suggests that although there may be more than one need or motivation animating an activity, there is one final object that results from a hierarchy of motives. Field educators negotiate this complexity and tension, but it is interesting to note the lack of comments made by

participants in this study about the role of a collective, or community, of field educators in defining the true motive for working with students. No participants talked about being motivated to work with students through a conversation with a field educator, or adopting the objective defined by a team of field educators. Luke did talk about influencing other small organisations to start providing student placements, but his objective appeared to be connected with accessing an unpaid skilled staffing resource for small under-resourced organisations. Zoe also talked about the influence of other field educators, but she identified the lack of encouragement or support to take on the role rather than advice about the goal of field education. Her experience illustrates the disconnection, even competition between field educators rather than collective responses to the challenges of working with students.

> *People sometimes see it as this special thing that they're doing and you're probably not up to it, and I've heard that. When I said I was being a field-work teacher for the first time, 'Oh, do you think you're up to that?' There's some funny feelings out there (Zoe, Individual Interview Participant).*

The data from this research suggests a lack of engagement from the field educator community to respond to the tension related to the object of field education. The community engaged in an activity plays a role in defining the true motive (Kaptelinin, 2005) and yet the analysis suggests this was not happening in field education. This is illustrated in Figure 7-2.

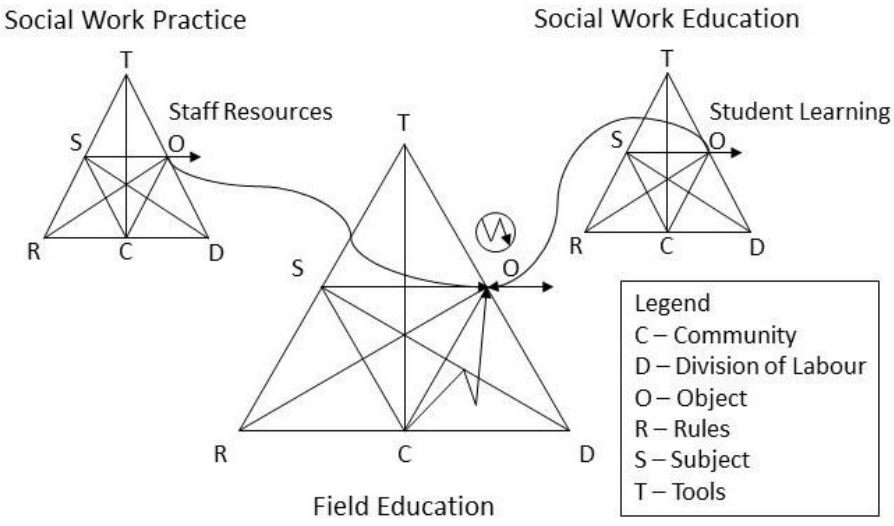


***Figure 7-2: Tension between the community of practitioners and the object of field education.***

Figure 7-2 shows the tension created within the object node (zigzag in the circle) due to the influence of the objectives of two related activity systems. Social work practice exerts an influence on the object focused on staff resources, whilst education is focused on student learning. The jagged arrow between the community and object nodes denotes the tension that is associated with the lack of engagement of the community of practitioners in addressing the tension between these two dominant discourses about the object of field education.

The lack of engagement of the field educator community in addressing the object of field education might also be conceptualised as an absence of a negotiated joint enterprise. This is Wenger's (1998) second indicator of a community of practice. Wenger argues that shared ways of engaging in activity involve more than simply what an organisation says should be done. In fact, members of a community of practice define both what is done and the way it should be done and hold each other accountable for this negotiated enterprise. Initial examination of the descriptions of their work, given by participants in this research, might suggest that they were engaged in a common enterprise. However, deeper analysis of the data suggests that participants were influenced by different ideas from either education or social work practice about the objective of their activities. There did not appear to be evidence of field educators directly negotiating the goal of working with students. This suggests an absence of a community of practice, and yet the tension associated with this very weakness could ultimately catalyse change.

Engeström (2001) suggests that tensions that develop over time within activity systems are the source of potential learning and transformation. The limited engagement of the field educator community in defining the object of working with students may indicate this kind of tension. One possible explanation for the findings in this research might be that this developing tension will at some point lead to change in the activity system. However, it is interesting to note the lack of apparent questioning from participants about the need for any collective response to the contradictions surrounding the object of their work. This is perhaps related to the isolation of field educators and their lack of a sense of belonging to a team or collective of other practitioners. This analysis suggests that for transformation to occur in this activity system, it may be necessary to find ways to mobilise the community of field educators, raise awareness of common challenges and catalyse collective action. This is consistent with the interventionist approach often

adopted by researchers using activity theory (Engeström, 2011; Sannino & Sutter, 2011), which I discuss later in relation to the findings from the focus groups.

## 7.3 Community Influence on the Rules and Tools

From the perspectives of Engeström's (1987) version of activity theory, goal-directed activity is always mediated through the use of tools and governed by written and unwritten rules (see Chapter 3). In addition to the tension surrounding the object of field education, analysis of the individual interviews indicated uncertainty in relation to the rules that field educators should follow. Although participants talked about the influence of policies and procedures from both the practice and education contexts, there was very limited reference to the influence of field educators on this area of the work, either individually or as a collective. Mark provided a rare exception when he referred to a group of field educators and students in his agency who developed a policy specifically related to field education. He described a working party from over 20 years ago and the evolution of the subsequent policy in a number of team contexts in the national organisation.

> *The policy, when it was first written, was quite a number of years ago, and I think I might have had a bit to do [with writing it]. In fact, I remember writing the policy. So, [the current policy] probably descended . . . from the [team name] one which is descended from one I can remember when I was on the quality working party back in the nineties and writing a policy with four students back in Christchurch (Mark, Individual Interview Participant).*

Interestingly, this policy appears to have provided a specific framework for field educators based on the idea of increasing independence for students over the duration of the placement. This was an excellent example of how the collective practice wisdom of field educators could be incorporated into the development of guidelines or policies. However, such instances were rare and did not appear to have influenced the development of similar documents in other agencies. Mark wondered if the policy might have been adopted by other teams in the same organisation, but his uncertainty highlights the general lack of engagement with other field educators in relation to the rules governing field education practice. Whilst this localised policy was admirable, the involvement of field educators from across other agencies could potentially have resulted in a more robust and nuanced approach.

In a similar way to the general lack of collective engagement in the development of rules for field education, my analysis indicated community disengagement in relation to the evolution of effective methods and tools for working with students. Although I identified several examples of creative practice in the interviews, there was limited evidence that field educators shared this learning with each other. Zoe talked about her participation in an informal peer-learning group with two other colleagues. This group had been developed by the practitioners themselves and provided an opportunity for the participants to share knowledge and ideas for ways to work with students. Unfortunately, the group had a limited lifespan because senior managers did not believe it was a useful activity for the social workers to be engaged in. Robert also described the sharing of teaching tools with colleagues in his office, although this appears to have been driven by the students rather than through the intentional planning of the field educators. These examples illustrated the potential for field educators to support each other through the development and sharing of methods and tools for practice.

Practitioners also talked about their observation of other field educators and described how this influenced their own practice. Field educators gave examples of how their teaching approaches had been influenced by what they had seen as successful in other practice contexts. Other participants also talked about learning things they did not want to replicate through their observation of other field educators. Examples were provided of field educators giving students large policy manuals to read, allowing students to contribute to high-risk work with other colleagues, or failing to protect students from activities deemed inappropriate for inexperienced practitioners. Whilst these examples illustrated the informal learning that took place through observation, there appeared to be a lack of intentional learning from colleagues about the most effective teaching and learning practises that had been developed over time.

Whilst the creative examples of learning and development provided by participants may have been productive for the individual, this innovation is unlikely to transform field education due to the lack of engagement with the wider community of practitioners. Other influences on the field educator, in the form of an apprenticeship model from social work practice, or an assessment model from social work education, therefore appeared to be more dominant. Figure 7-3 illustrates the influences of tools from social work practice or education and the tension that results from the lack of engagement by the community of field educators in the development of practice.

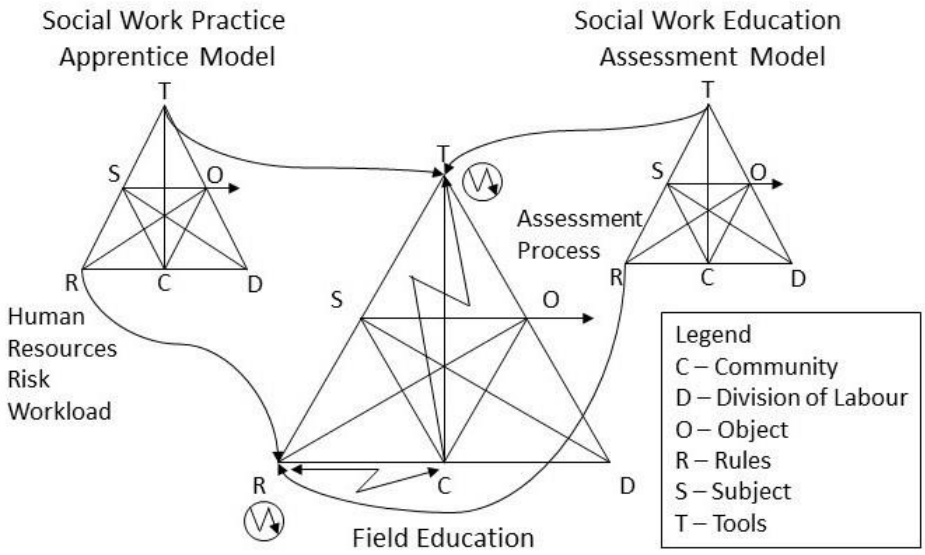


***Figure 7-3: Community tensions related to the tools and rules used by field educators.***

In Figure 7-3 an apprentice model from social work practice contrasts with an assessment model within the social work education activity system. Both these tools transfer across the boundaries between the activity systems and influence how field educators undertake their work. However, in the absence of the active engagement of the community of field educators in determining the tools to be used (shown by the jagged arrow), a tension is created within the field education activity system indicated by the zigzag and circle. A similar situation is also shown in relation to the rules influencing field educators. Policies related to human resources, risk, or workload from social work practice, compete with the assessment process provided by the academic institution. Tensions shown by the jagged arrows are created within the rules node of field education and between the community node due to a lack of engagement in producing collectively agreed rules.

The lack of collective participation in the development of practice is further illustrated by the apparent absence of a bicultural model of field education, as discussed in Chapter 6. However, there were some examples of participants developing pedagogical approaches to engage students in thinking about te Tiriti o Waitangi. For example, Martin talked about adopting a questioning approach to encourage students to critically analyse whether bicultural principles were influencing social work practice.

> *I always ask [students], what do you know about the Treaty? How do you think it plays out in our practice every day? Can we do anything else beyond what we're doing? One example they use of the Treaty in practice is*

> *the family group conference. Is there anything that we should be doing that we're not doing? And I think that [the placement] is definitely the venue for making that happen (Martin, Individual Interview Participant).*

Whilst this example of a specific strategy to explore bicultural practice with students is encouraging, there was no evidence that this kind of initiative was influencing the practice of other field educators. Martin appears to have developed this strategy through his own experimentation but was not engaged in a forum where other practitioners might benefit from his learning. The focus group interviews identified that participants were interested in contributing to the development of bicultural approaches to field education and the potential for mutual engagement to promote this kind of learning. The participation of field educators in the development of methods, tools and approaches to field education appears to have been hampered by the lack of an active community of practice.

The lack of comments about the influence of the collective of field educators on the rules or tools for practice could possibly be related to the questions that were asked in the individual interviews. Alternatively, the lack of a strong network and partnership between field educators could explain the lack of comments. Participants talked about their lack of contact with other field educators and their relative isolation in practice and this seems a likely explanation for the lack of involvement in the development of rules and tools for working with students. Wenger (1998) suggests that the third marker of a community of practice is a shared repertoire. He argues that a wide variety of things evolve over time to constitute and re-constitute a repertoire, including routines, language and tools. This definition would seem consistent with the concepts of rules and tools within activity theory. The preceding analysis has shown the tensions present within these nodes of the field education activity system, suggesting that a shared repertoire may not be present. This might be seen as an overly simplistic conclusion since participants in this study did describe using many of the same rules or tools for working with students. However, these consistencies belie the lack of community engagement in negotiating this shared repertoire, which appears to originate in the related activity systems of social work practice or education, rather than amongst field educators themselves. Once again, this analysis suggests an underactive community strongly influenced by external factors and so it may be helpful to describe these relationships in the form of a conceptual model.

## 7.4 Field Education Conceptual Model

My analysis of the individual and focus group interviews indicates that the absence of an active community for field educators to participate in was a significant influence on the practice of participants in this study. Participants described experiences that could be interpreted, in the language of communities of practice, to indicate a lack of "mutual engagement", "joint enterprise" and a "shared repertoire" (Wenger, 1998, p. 74). Although this might be interpreted as indicating a lack of evidence for a field educator community of practice, from an activity theory perspective a community of practitioners remains part of the activity of field education. A community node containing several tensions does not negate the presence of a community but rather indicates a potential site for transformation (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). A weak community indicates the dominance of other influences on the practice of field educators as illustrated in Figure 7-4.

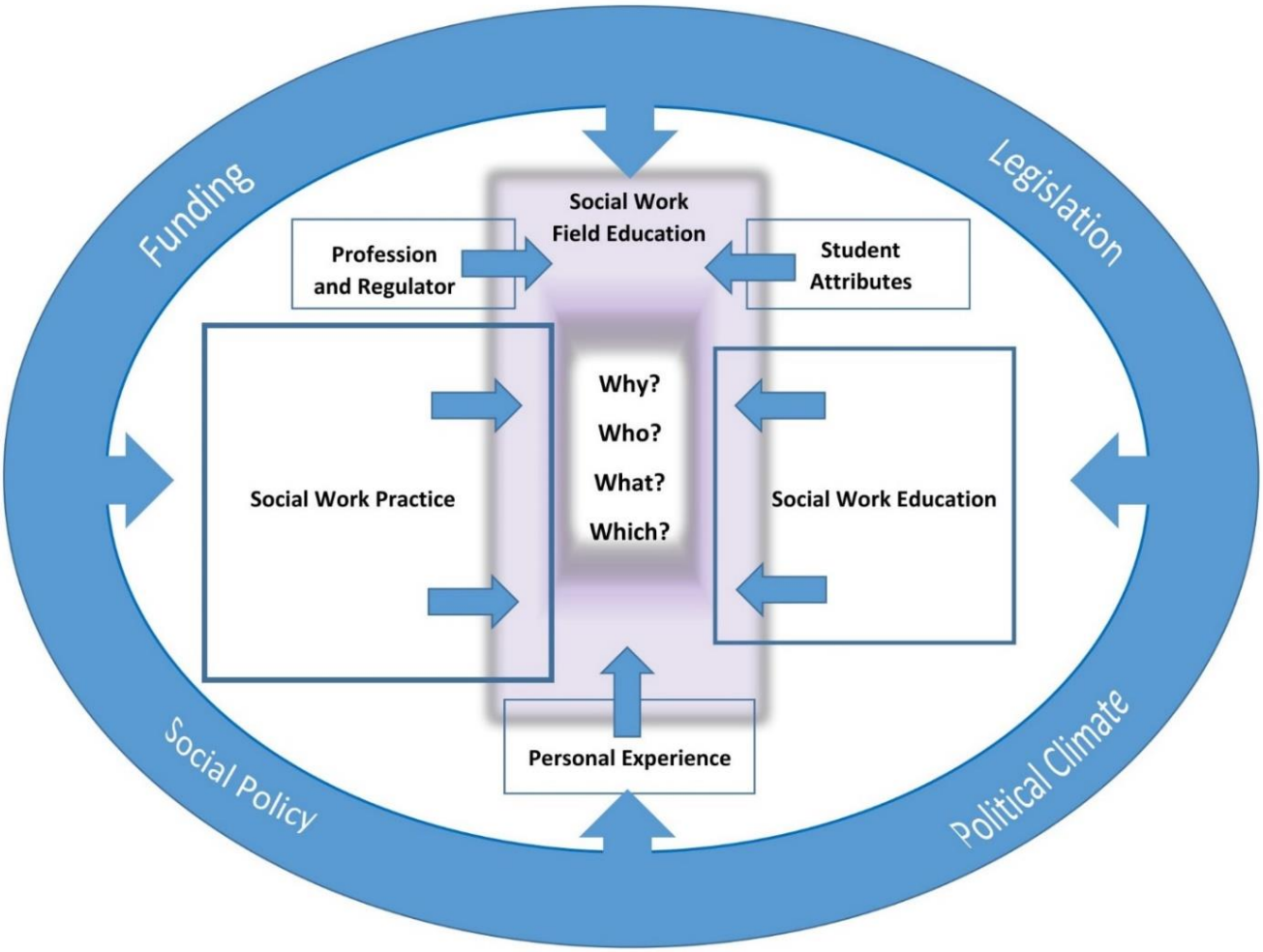


***Figure 7-4: A Field Education Conceptual Model.***

At the centre of the conceptual model in Figure 7-4 is the field education system in which a collective of field educators practise. This community is shown as a blurred area, indicating that it lacks clear boundaries and the collective has developed limited structures to guide, support and protect practitioners. As part of this community, individual field educators seek to address a series of questions as they practice with students. Firstly, they require motivation for working with students and an understanding of the object of the work. As a result, they ask, “Why am I doing the work of a field educator?” Secondly, practitioners seek support and guidance in their work to avoid a sense of isolation. They ask themselves, “Who will support me in this role?” Field educators also require rules and boundaries to guide their work with students and so they ask, “What am I required to do when I work with students?” Finally, in response to the wide range of methods and tools that might be helpful when working with students, field educators experiment with multiple options as they ask themselves, “Which methods are most useful when I work with students?” In the absence of clear answers from the field educator community, practitioners seek solutions from other contexts.

As I discussed in Chapter 5, field educators are influenced by social work practice, social work education, their own personal life experience, student attributes and the professional association and regulator. Each of these contributes answers to the four key questions that field educators seek to answer. The social work practice context is depicted as the largest box in Figure 7-4 because it is the location in which the field educator works and therefore of the most significant influence. The social work education context is also very influential and has specific requirements that the practitioner must follow. To a lesser extent, personal experience is an important contributor to practice, including memories of being a social work student but also events from earlier in life. Factors related to the student, such as their motivation, experience and competence also impact on how the field educator approaches their work. Lastly, the professional association and registration authority influence practice through policies and guidelines. As Maidment (2000b) and Schwaber Kerson (1994) have pointed out, the whole system is also influenced by macro factors such as the political environment, social policy, legislation and levels of funding.

This conceptual model is focused on the activity of field education as a whole and describes the range of factors that influence practice in light of the underdeveloped role of the community involved in the work. However, it also highlights that individual

practitioners are influenced by a unique set of factors and they respond in personal ways. Even practitioners working in the same team and with the same academic institution will be influenced in slightly different ways by their personal history or the attributes of the student they are working with. Each field educator, therefore, develops an individual response and unique approaches to their work. This helps to explain the diversity that can be seen in practice and the range of both positive and negative experiences reported by students (Wilson, Walsh, & Kirby, 2008). The model also highlights the potential for the development of field education practice through strengthening the field educator community so that practitioners collaborate in a process of continuous learning and improvement.

## 7.5 Building a sense of Community

The lack of participation of field educators in a community of their peers became a significant focus following analysis of the individual interviews. Consistent with a pragmatist or activity theorist approach to this early analysis, I asked focus group participants to discuss potential interventions that might address some of the community-located tensions identified in the individual interviews. The idea of developing stronger connections between field educators and a community that could promote the development of practice was a significant feature of these discussions. Participants suggested three ways in which this could be organised. Firstly, local face to face peer group meetings were proposed, either specifically for those working with the same cohort of students, or as an ongoing arrangement. Secondly, participants proposed a mentoring programme to connect new field educators with experienced practitioners. Thirdly, various forms of online support were suggested as a more accessible way to connect field educators that might overcome the barriers associated with the time pressures that practitioners experience.

### 7.5.1 Professional Learning Group

Participants in each of the focus groups indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to meet other field educators to discuss common issues and offer mutual support. Ruth said that even though she only worked part time she would still make the commitment to connect with other field educators if a group was available. A number of terms were used by different groups, including “peer supervision”, “peer support group” or simply “peer group”. Peer group seminars have previously been found to be an

effective method for supporting the learning of social work field educators (Bogo & Power, 1995; Finch & Feigelman, 2008). In the first focus group in the current research, Janice suggested that a meeting at the start of a placement would be sufficient to encourage the sharing of ideas and mutual support. Amy described this kind of meeting as a form of peer supervision and suggested it would only be necessary to meet two or three times during a 12-week placement. Whilst this frequency reflects the common practice of monthly supervision, it was unclear whether Amy was specifically referring to formal peer supervision or simply indicating a supportive collegial process.

> *I would love to meet with other field educators as a peer supervision arrangement. During a three-month placement it only needs to happen two or three times probably: once near the beginning, once in the middle and once a bit towards the end when we're doing the report and stuff. But I'd be totally happy to go to a meeting like that and you can just air some issues and support one another (Amy, Focus 2 Group Participant).*

Kate also mentioned the idea of peer supervision in the third focus group, proposing it as a way of addressing professional isolation. However, she connected peer supervision with the provision of collegial support rather than with professional oversight. Jessica adopted a contrasting attitude in the fifth focus group when she drew a clear distinction between supervision and the idea of a group to share experience and learning. Jessica specifically highlighted the value of discussing experiences, approaches and models of field education, suggesting a focus on collective learning.

> *Oh not like a supervision meeting for Field Educators, but something like that where you share experiences and your approaches and maybe you get information on new research or new models or it could be like a networking meeting but also a sharing, yeah sharing experiences, positive and negative I guess (Jessica, Focus Group 5 Participant).*

My overall sense of the groups being proposed by participants was that they were describing a professional learning group, which would provide an opportunity to discuss their work with students and share knowledge and expertise. In the second focus group, Nigel suggested that this kind of learning and support would be particularly beneficial in smaller agencies where he thought it would be more common for field educators to be isolated. However, in the fourth focus group, there was also discussion amongst field

educators working for a large statutory agency about the use of a "peer support group" to address isolation. Angela had responsibility for co-ordinating field education across this statutory agency and commented that practitioners can be isolated in some teams. She noted that students were provided with weekly peer support through group supervision but nothing similar was provided for field educators.

> *I've thrown around ideas in my head about peer support groups for fieldwork educators. Because it feels like we do that whole group supervision with the students and they get quite a lot of input – that intensive input on a Tuesday afternoon. But still fieldwork educators are [isolated] (Angela, Focus Group 4 Participant).*

Although participants in both the individual interviews and focus groups did give examples of groups that had provided the opportunity for field educators to connect and share ideas, this did not appear to be a common or particularly intentional model. My analysis of the focus groups indicated that participants would value the opportunity to meet together to share their experiences and learning as a method for mitigating the impact of working in an isolated role.

Professional learning communities have been an increasingly popular development in education since the 1990's (Stoll & Seashore, 2007), and are seen as the most promising educational strategy for helping all students learn to a high standard (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). This model provides an opportunity to overcome the traditional isolation of teachers so that they can collectively work towards improving the learning outcomes for students. Learning communities are based on Senge's model of learning organisations but emphasise the "development of people" rather than "organizational growth, productivity, efficiency and effectiveness (Mitchell & Sackney, 2011 p. 8). The professional learning community model has not significantly influenced the social work profession but has been found to result in positive outcomes for school-based social work practice (Carpenter-Aeby, Aeby, & Mozingo, 2011). Hord (2009) suggests six criteria for successful learning communities: shared purpose, distributed leadership, supportive structure conditions, supportive relational conditions, collective learning and open sharing of practice. These criteria closely reflect the factors identified in my research that impact field educator practice. The concerns and focus of the professional learning community model resonate with the need identified by participants in this

study to overcome their isolation from other field educators and to share experience to promote collective learning.

### 7.5.2 Homogeneity and Heterogeneity

A range of views were expressed in the focus groups about the value of shared or divergent experiences for the participants in a professional learning community. The participants in the second focus group suggested that it would be helpful to connect field educators from agencies working in the same field of practice. This was proposed on the apparent assumption that field educators working with the same client group would share similar challenges in working out how best to facilitate student learning. Participants in this focus group also suggested that gathering with field educators working with students at the same stage of study would be more helpful than random groupings because the issues vary at different stages of the programme. During the fifth focus group, Jessica suggested that she would have appreciated meeting with field educators from other non-government agencies. There was some evidence in the third and fourth focus groups of the benefit of an approach based on homogeneity. Both of these groups were comprised predominantly of field educators from single fields of practice, in one case statutory child protection, and in the other specialist mental health. Participants in both of these groups appeared to share similar experiences of the challenges that face field educators, and a common understanding of the unique issues in their context. However, in both groups, there were also participants who had divergent views and this led to the presentation of the kind of challenge that could promote learning within a peer group. At the same time, those groups where a mix of fields of practice were represented did not appear to present extremely different experiences or challenges in how to support students. In fact, Nicola, one of the participants from mental health services, suggested that there would be more benefit from meeting with field educators from different types of agencies and client groups. Although it may be necessary to translate ideas from one context to another, observation of the focus groups appeared to indicate that field educators share common difficulties that collective problem-solving might be able to overcome. This research did not set out to establish the most effective approach to a field educator group and, therefore, further research would be required to establish whether homogeneity or heterogeneity would be more useful as a way of promoting fresh thinking amongst practitioners.

The different views about the relative importance of homogeneity or heterogeneity appeared to be connected to the importance placed on catalysing creative problem-solving. The idea that a professional learning group could provide a catalyst to new approaches to field education was specifically discussed in the fifth focus group. Jessica suggested that field educators would benefit from meeting to discuss their experiences and approaches towards working with students and proposed that this could lead to creativity.

> *You could come up with some creative placements if you had more of those connections, couldn't you? (Jessica, Focus Group 5 Participant).*

Joanne picked up this idea of creativity in the same discussion and suggested that a professional learning group could be a place where field educators from different agencies could explore the potential for working together to provide placements across multiple agency contexts. This idea responds to one of the challenges facing field education, namely how to create new placements when social workers are already struggling with their workload and feel unable to take on the additional work of supporting a student on their own. Other challenges facing field education could potentially also be addressed through sharing ideas in a professional learning group, as illustrated by the discussion surrounding bicultural practice.

Amy specifically connected the idea of a professional learning group to the development of bicultural practice in field education. She noted that she did not receive any support within her organisation to encourage the use of culturally appropriate approaches to teaching and learning. Amy suggested that a professional learning group would be one way that this support could be provided to field educators in unsupportive work settings. Kate also made a connection between the provision of peer support and the development of bicultural practice. She suggested that a professional learning group could promote new learning because participants would be challenged by colleagues to develop their practice.

> *I guess if you were fieldwork educators meeting in a region then you'd say it could be a clear challenge for yourself in terms of your own bicultural practice around how we develop that ourselves within our corporate education. So that would send you down a different pathway in terms of*

> *actively seeking to go out there and find something that you can then apply, ya know to your practice (Kate, Focus 3 Group Participant).*

During the third focus group, Rebekah also commented that creating a network of field educators through a professional learning group would also have the benefit of connecting practitioners to colleagues with specific expertise who could provide advice when necessary. She connected this idea specifically to the development of bicultural field education practice, but potentially professional learning groups could be used to respond to a number of areas of practice that need to be developed.

### 7.5.3 Barriers to Professional Learning Groups

Participants did identify a number of concerns about the idea of professional learning groups. A major factor appeared to be concern about the efficient and effective use of time. A second barrier was raised by Nicola who said that she did not think she needed to participate in a "peer support group" because she had been working with students for some time and knew who to approach if she felt in need of support or advice. These two issues were also identified as significant concerns in research undertaken by Finch and Feigelman (2008) into the use of peer group seminars with field educators. Nicola commented that an expectation to participate in a group would be too much additional pressure on top of a busy workload.

> *I know [the agencies field education adviser is] there. I know that backup and that's enough for me. I'm trying to think of back when I started, when I wasn't so confident, what it was like, but I think always just knowing [the agencies field education adviser was] there if I need[ed them] was enough. I'm aware that we have to meet twice during the placement or whatever, with the student, and it's like yeah, I've gotta make time for that. I'm trying to be quite rigid about our one hour supervision with my student each week, so that's already a big commitment and I think it would be a stressor for me to feel the pressure to be part of a peer support group and that that would be too much (Nicola, Focus Group 4 Participant).*

Interestingly, as this focus group progressed there seemed to be a shift in Nicola's opinion about the idea of a group, highlighting the powerful influence of a group discussion. Ruth noted that new field educators require support to learn good practice and this could be assisted by a peer group. This comment subtly shifted the focus from a

group to support Nicola onto the process of supporting learning for others. Although the term professional learning group was not used, this seems a better description than a peer support group. In response to this suggestion, Nicola commented that her view had changed during the discussion and, although she may not personally feel the need for a group, she would be prepared to offer her expertise for the benefit of less experienced practitioners.

> *I guess that was the shift for me, in discussing it. It's like yeah, okay, I don't feel I need it [a support group]. Maybe I'm missing something – maybe I do – but as well, if I could contribute, that's a different thing again. I'm happy to make time if it's something…that's gonna be useful (Nicola, Focus Group 4 Participant).*

Although participants expressed concern about the time required to participate in a professional learning group, my analysis suggested that the substantive issue was more related to the outcomes of meeting together. The participants in the fourth focus group addressed this concern, suggesting that a degree of formality would be necessary for any professional learning group to be helpful. This was supported during the third focus group when Helen commented that she would only want to participate in a group that used the time in a productive manner. She suggested that this might require some formal learning elements such as a presentation or academic journal articles as resources.

> *Helen: For me personally, I don't want to go along to something that's a whinge and moan session. There's not going to be any purpose or outcome to it. That's not helpful for me anyway.*
>
> *Dominic: So what would be helpful?*
>
> *Helen: Something more structured I suppose, where there was - hey this time we are going to talk about this particular model and how you might apply it to field education - or some Prezi, or handout, or a research article in relation to it (Helen, Focus Group 3 Participant).*

Angela noted that this kind of model was already being successfully used in mental health services for practitioners authorised to make assessments for admission to hospital under the mental health act. She commented that this group included a mix of formal and informal elements, sharing experiences and ideas and that this was well

attended by practitioners. Due to workload pressures, participants indicated that they would not commit to a process that did not have a clear benefit for practice. However, it was interesting to note that this would not necessarily need to be a personal benefit, and some participants were willing to commit their time to a group where they adopted a mentoring role.

### 7.5.4 Mentors

During the focus groups, the idea of mentors for field educators was identified as another example of the potential benefits of developing a community of field educators and was related to the proposal for a professional learning group. The need for experienced practitioners to mentor new field educators was also identified by Rebholz (2013) in her research with nurses. In the first focus group in the present study, Caroline talked about the importance of field educators having someone who they trust to support them during a placement. Karla suggested in the second focus group that this kind of relationship could be initiated at a formal professional development event or professional learning group but could then be continued informally through natural opportunities for conversation. Later in the same discussion, Amy called this a buddy system and talked about the informal support that could be provided to field educators in this way.

> *But it might be just a buddy system. If I'm a new field educator and I'm really at sea, and you've been doing it for 10 years, we might be just linked up, and we can just go and have a cup of tea together, or have breakfast together, or something like that. I can ring you up and say, 'oh my God, what do I do now?' It could be that kind of little buddy system that would support people (Amy, Focus Group 2 Participant).*

A Mentoring system was also discussed in the fourth focus group but connected with the idea of sharing responsibility for a placement. Angela suggested that new field educators could be partnered with experienced practitioners to provide a placement and that this would be a way of supporting the professional development of the new practitioner. During the same discussion, Nicola suggested that partnering new field educators with experienced practitioners could be formalised as an expectation following initial training along with a commitment to quickly start working with a student. This approach appeared to be similar to the concept of the role of "old timers"

(Lave & Wenger, 1991 p. 57) in a community of practice. Lave and Wenger suggest that new practitioners in a work setting play a peripheral role and learn from experienced colleagues how to participate in more meaningful ways. The participants in the fourth focus group appeared to suggest that this kind of process could be formalised through working together to support a student so that the less experienced practitioner learns the role of field educator. Interestingly, participants talked about both face-to-face and online methods of mentoring.

### 7.5.5 Online Support

Participants in the focus groups talked about using online methods for connecting field educators and creating a community of support. Moore (2008) argues that using online tools to create virtual communities of practice is a useful pedagogical strategy that could transform the social work education process. Webster (2013) also found that a virtual community of practice is a viable strategy for professional development with social workers, as long as it is preceded by an opportunity for face to face relationship building.

In the fourth focus group, Rebekah said that accessing a wider network of field educators through online connections would be helpful when faced with questions that colleagues in the same team did not have answers for.

> *If I knew there was a place with email addresses where I could connect with somebody who was also a fieldwork educator, then in those moments when you are uncertain [you could contact them for advice]. I mean we use each other that you work with in your own organisation but if you had a bigger question, if you knew there was another point of contact where you could just post a question. And someone could moderate that or provide some links (Rebekah, Focus Group 4 Participant).*

Online support was identified by a number of groups as a method for providing support and developing a network for field educators that also acknowledged the challenges associated with the busyness of most practitioners. Rebekah commented that she would find it difficult to participate in a face-to-face professional learning group due to time limitations but said that it would be possible to engage with online resources because she could do this at any convenient moment. Participants in the same focus group discussed the benefits of webinar presentations because these could be watched after the

event if work commitments made it impossible to attend at the time. Rebekah even suggested gathering a group of local practitioners together to watch a webinar after work, which was an interesting illustration of the potential for online approaches to interact with face-to-face activities. Although participants acknowledged that people have different levels of confidence with web-based resources, there was general agreement that this approach may help respond to some of the barriers associated with professional groups, particularly time. Wendy summarised the sentiment of most participants when she noted that although time was a scarce resource for field educators, web-based technologies presented the potential for overcoming this barrier.

> *In terms of starting a kind of a network or meetings . . . I hear a lot about some fieldwork educators . . . not having time to do anything . . . but you know with technology now it's different (Wendy, Focus Group 5 Participant).*

In addition to community building, participants talked about using web-based professional development materials. In the first focus group, Caroline talked about accessing online support when she had problems with her computer and suggested this could be a helpful model for supporting field educators. She described accessing the support of a help-desk technician and also various video materials to learn about features with her computer.

> *I'm just thinking that recently I've had quite a bit of problem with my computer and I've had to go to a help-desk and I've done it all online and it impressed me. Because there were some videos that told me about certain things and used the right words, so I knew what POPs [Post Office Protocol e-mail standards] were, and the other things, and all of that. Maybe something along those lines could be really helpful (Caroline, Focus Group 1 Participant).*

Later in the discussion with this focus group, other participants talked about providing the paperwork associated with a placement through a website. Discussion forums, e-learning activities, regular webinar presentations, journal articles and regular updates were other learning resources that participants in a number of focus groups suggested field educators could access online. Although previous research with teachers (Trevethan, 2013) indicated that field educators did not actually value online resources,

the provision of such materials did prompt valuable collegial conversations. This points to the potential for online support to interact with face-to-face activities.

## 7.6 Professional Education

Professional development was a topic of discussion in a number of focus groups, both in terms of online materials and face-to-face events. Interestingly, Helen made a connection between a field educator professional learning group and the provision of professional development opportunities. Participants in the third focus group were discussing the need to develop bicultural field education practice and Helen suggested that a professional learning group could be a forum where the need for specific training could be identified.

> *If there was an educator group or body [professional learning group] or something, then that would be a really good forum to request some formal training and some education around [bicultural field education] . . . So it would be a professional development opportunity for the educator to attend, a workshop, or something in relation to that (Helen, Focus Group 3 Participant).*

During the fourth focus group, Nicola made a similar suggestion in relation to using a professional group to initiate training about kaupapa Māori pedagogy, but also connected the same approach to other professional development needs such as alternative supervision models. Participants talked about the value of more formal learning opportunities and suggested that field educators would make the time to participate, particularly if they had been involved in selecting the topics rather than being required to attend prescribed events. The idea of formal professional development was also seen as a way to ensure that a professional forum would be a productive use of time and not simply a social networking opportunity.

Professional development was identified in several focus groups as a potential opportunity for collaboration between field educators, employers and academic institutions. Participants talked about the members of a field educator professional forum identifying learning needs and incorporating formal training into their time together. An important benefit of developing such learning opportunities that participants discussed was the fact that this activity could be used to demonstrate on-going professional development to employers and for the purpose of professional

registration. Participants talked about the value of a certificate of attendance at professional development events so that these could be included in their professional development portfolio. The role of the academic institutions was also highlighted in these discussions as a key, though not sole, provider of training for field educators. Jessica proposed an event that might incorporate informal networking and professional learning and connect together the various objectives of field educators, employers and academic institutions. She described an event facilitated by an academic institution: that would be a required activity during a placement, so employers would realise the necessity; that would include informal networking for field educators, over food and drink; that would result in a certificate, to acknowledge field educator's engagement in professional development; and include the presentation of models or theories that would inform practice, both with students and more broadly.

> *If it was part of the placement that would be quite good, like a day where field educators got together and students got together, like a parallel thing. And if there was something that was offered to field educators like, food and wine, but maybe a speaker or something like that I'd like that as part of that day. And then if there was a PD certificate kind of thing and so it was packaged as part of the placement and like an acknowledgement of the work you do, kind of thing, that would be quite cool. So when you go into a placement everybody knows you're gonna be doing this day thing and sharing your experiences and wisdoms. And also you're gonna be maybe finding out something about this model of supervision that could be quite useful in practice, not just with the student (Jessica, Focus Group 5 Participant).*

The integration of both formal socialisation through education and also the agency of practitioners as they respond to some of the challenges in their environment is an important aspect of Miller's (2010) model of professional socialisation that informed this research. This holistic approach was reflected in the recommendations made by participants for variety in the methods of professional development and supporting field educators. The need for various different strategies for support was particularly emphasised by the second focus group. Amy suggested that creativity was required so that different forms of assistance could be made available, perhaps beginning with a formal training event but including opportunities for informal networking and followed up by mentoring and a professional learning group. Karla particularly emphasised that it

would be important to avoid any sense of pressure or compulsion because field educators would not be able to manage this on top of their existing responsibilities. Nigel suggested that the academic institutions should aim to facilitate a range of opportunities for field educators to engage in learning and support, but not force their participation. Although the other focus groups did not discuss this idea in as much detail, other participants also made reference to the idea of a mixed economy of support for field educator development, some initiated by practitioners themselves, some by employers and others facilitated by the academic institutions.

The role of academic institutions was also highlighted by participants in relation to a qualification in field education. Participants in the first focus group talked about the need for a postgraduate programme for field educators that covered topics related to supervision but also specifically addressed other aspects of field education practice. Amy suggested in the second focus group that a training package should cover teaching and learning methods and be tailored towards both new and experienced field educators. Nigel said that comprehensive formal education would perhaps reduce the reliance of field educators on trial and error because practitioners would have completed training about effective practice models. Participants indicated that they believed the academic institutions had a responsibility to provide this kind of professional education. Whether formal qualification or continued professional development, participants clearly identified education as a key component of any strategy to address the tensions within the field education activity system.

## 7.7 Professional Recognition

Formal education was also seen as a way to increase the professional recognition of field educators. Janice suggested that a postgraduate course would raise the profile of field education and be a way of rewarding practitioners for their willingness to support the development of the profession. She also said this would recompense field educators for their work, implying, perhaps naively, that it should be free of charge.

> *I think if you develop some sort of postgrad paper that came out of this [research], it would make it really sexy in the social work profession. Alongside . . . supervision but made it fieldwork education. I think it would raise its profile, make it a bit more attractive. It's aiming to get something for our generosity of giving (Janice, Focus Group 1 Participant).*

Karla also indicated that more formal training would raise the professional standing of field education and that this would result in a shift in how field educators perceive the importance of their work. This is a pertinent point because participants in this study indicated on several occasions that their work was not sufficiently valued. A qualification in field education was therefore seen as a way to increase the status of the work as well as the competence of field educators. There is evidence that this is what happened in the UK following the introduction of the Practice Teacher Award (Slater, 2007) and in Northern Ireland following the introduction of a more localised programme (Douglas & Magee, 2012). Despite these benefits, the UK model proved to be unsustainable due to the resource implications (Bellinger, 2010), highlighting the complexities of making postgraduate qualifications in field education widely available.

Participants in my research discussed the existing provision of formal education in field education, and identified the benefits in terms of feeling prepared and equipped for the role. Several participants made reference in both the individual interviews and focus groups to the training they had completed with the local academic institutions. In general, this consisted of one or two day events either before participants had worked with students or as on-going professional development. Two participants also mentioned that they had completed a qualification in field education in the UK. However, at the time of this research none of the local academic institutions provided specific postgraduate qualifications in either professional supervision or field education. An internet search identified postgraduate level qualifications in supervision provided by five other academic institutions in Aotearoa, most available to distance students, but none appeared to be specific to field education. In the fourth focus group, Helen talked about the benefits of completing a specific qualification in field education whilst she was living in the UK. Cathy said that she had tried to find something similar locally but had only been able to identify a distance programme in Australia. The history of the Practice Teacher Award in the UK suggests that making a year of study compulsory for all field educators may not be sustainable, since this objective was never achieved despite significant efforts over more than 20 years before the scheme was withdrawn (Bellinger, 2010). However, participants in this study did not propose that a postgraduate qualification should be a requirement for all field educators, but rather, that making one available may have benefits both in terms of practitioner competence and professional standing.

In addition to the role that formal education might play in creating a sense of being recognised for working as a field educator, participants talked about wanting to receive other forms of recognition for their work. Caroline suggested during the first focus group that to create a greater sense of being part of a team of field educators would necessitate the identification of what makes a good team. Participants in this focus group went on to identify a number of things that might create a sense of team, including sharing lunch together, receiving a small gift of thanks, receiving a certificate, or access to organisational resources such as the library. Initially, the group suggested that these forms of recognition were not being provided but later identified a number of examples where academic institutions were, in fact, providing forms of recognition. Similar comments were made in the other focus groups, some participants suggesting that there was a lack of academic recognition for their work but others identifying examples of tokens of appreciation. This pattern suggests that participants still felt under-appreciated despite academic institutions genuinely trying to acknowledge the work of field educators. It is interesting that the first focus group made a connection between appreciation and a sense of team. This suggests that creating a stronger sense of belonging to a community of practice may be an important key to addressing feelings of being under-appreciated.

Participants also talked about the need for recognition from their employer. This was mostly connected with the idea of being given time to work with students and therefore a reduced workload. Helen described this as respect for the field educator role. Participants in both the individual interviews and focus groups identified a range of experiences within different organisations, some being given recognition in terms of their workload and others being expected to continue as normal. During the third focus, group Kate talked about the need for a job description for field educators so that the additional work was acknowledged by employers. This idea was mentioned again by Jessica in the fifth focus group, particularly in relation to a suggestion that field education should be seen as a professional role, distinct from either social work or professional supervision. Jessica suggested that field educators should have a contract and a job description so that their work was properly recognised by the profession. Joanne also suggested that professional registration should include an expectation that qualified social workers provide a certain number of student placements and that this would result in employers having to incorporate this requirement into employment contracts. These proposals for greater professional recognition appear to be connected to

the visibility of field education as a professional activity. Whilst field educators may seek greater recognition from academic institutions, their employer or the professional regulator, achieving this may require an advocacy process to challenge current practice. Potentially, the creation of a community of field educators may offer the opportunity for an advocacy process that would be more effective than could be achieved individually.

## 7.8 Partnership

Not only did participants in this research talk about their hope for greater recognition of their work from academic institutions or their employers, but they also frequently identified the role of these and other players when discussing solutions to the challenges facing field educators. It appeared that participants often identified the role that other actors would play, rather than the responsibility of the community of field educators to take ownership of initiating change. Participants particularly referred to academic staff but also talked about the role of employers, professional bodies or even students.

Participants in the first focus group talked about the variability of support provided by academic staff and were asked to comment on whether they thought field educators could collectively support colleagues who were not receiving sufficient support. In response, Matthew commented that it was such a contextual problem and that the field liaison staff needed to be doing something differently. This response appeared to deflect the question away from field educators and back to the academic staff. A similar interaction took place in the second focus group when participants were asked to comment on how practitioners could address the challenges associated with a lack of connection between field educators and the barriers to providing peer support. In response to this question participants again talked about the role of academic staff. Nigel suggested that a tenfold increase in the capacity of field liaison staff to visit students more regularly was necessary. Amy also suggested that the academic institutions needed to improve the support for field educators and the group discussed the importance of recognising that if a student is struggling in a placement then the field educator is also likely to be finding things difficult. These comments illustrate the tendency of participants to identify the role of academic staff in responding to the challenges facing field educators, even when directly asked about the role of a collective of field educators.

A further example of this phenomenon came up in a discussion in the first focus group about the tension between an organisational perspective of students as a workforce resource and an academic focus on learning. Participants were asked to comment on the role that the community of field educators might play in supporting colleagues to manage this tension. In response to this question, Karla suggested that students needed to advocate for themselves and so required more preparation before placement. Nigel concurred and commented that it was really helpful when students were able to explain their learning style and needs. Helen made a similar comment in the third focus group, suggesting that students required an understanding of the tensions that exist in field education. Participants appeared to deflect questions related to the potential for a collective response from field educators and highlight the role of students. Academic staff were once again also identified as those responsible for preparing the students to have this knowledge and the skills of self-advocacy.

Whilst these comments may not necessarily be inappropriate, they are an interesting response to questions about what field educators could collectively do in response to tensions in their work. This might be a reflection of the absence of a community of practice in field education. If participants did not identify with a collective, or feel part of a team of field educators, then it is perhaps unsurprising that they struggled with questions related to these entities. Unger (2003) appears to have faced similar challenges when exploring the potential value of peer support for field educators, explaining the contrast to earlier research (e.g. Rogers, 1995) about whether group support was valued by field educators. At the same time, it is possible that participants were simply reflecting a lack of consensus about who is responsible for the development of field education. This was clearly articulated by Rebekah during a discussion in the third focus group about how to develop a stronger sense of community between field educators. Rebekah used the analogy of a bus driver, the person responsible for taking the people from one destination to another, and questioned who is taking this role in the development of field education. She suggested that the absence of developmental work is related to the lack of agreement about who should provide leadership.

> *But it's a bit about who's driving the bus, because the [academic institutions] are always searching for placements. Some organisations are always [providing placements] and it works well. But when it comes down to who's going to step up and take the value of that role . . . who should? Is*

> *it the profession? Should the [professional] association have a role? Is it the University and the learning institutions? Or [does] everyone have a role? Who's going to drive the bus? And I think that's why no one does because we haven't made that decision about who should be (Rebekah, Focus Group 3 Participant).*

Although leadership may be a critical issue to resolve, participants emphasised the importance of the partnership between field educators, students, academic staff and employers. No single agent is likely to be able to resolve the tensions faced in field education and change requires a partnership approach.

## 7.9 Implications

This research is informed by a constructionist epistemology and therefore I have emphasised the role of social interaction in defining truth. The research is also informed by Vygotsky's perspective on learning, which highlights social engagement and, in common with Dewey, the role of language and shared tools in mediating activity (Miettinen, 2006). It follows that from the outset I have been interested in the influence of the community engaged in the work of field education. I explored situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) at an early stage in the research, and the concept of communities of practice appeared to have merit as an explanation for how social workers move from the periphery of education and develop a professional identity as a field educator. However, I discarded this approach due to concerns that the model can be overly prescriptive of communities of practice as a solution to organisational learning needs rather than simply descriptive of how learning take place (Hughes, 2007). I, therefore, decided to employ activity theory as a heuristic and descriptive tool because it encourages the consideration of a broad set of influences on practice and a balanced perspective of community alongside other dimensions of practice such as the ultimate motive, the tools, or rules for practice (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010).

Despite my caution about the prescriptive nature of situated learning theory, the concept of community became an important part of the analysis. Participants frequently talked about their disconnection from other field educators and their sense of isolation in their work. The potential value of engaging with other practitioners was repeatedly mentioned in the interviews along with the idea that the current model of field education was more disconnected than in the past. The lack of engagement by the community of

field educators in other tensions in the activity system was also noted in the analysis of the individual interviews. Tensions related to the object, rules and tools, which I discussed in Chapter 5, each appeared to have a connection back to the role of the community. This issue, therefore, became a feature of the discussions in the focus groups and the role of a community of practice re-emerged at this stage in the analysis.

Participants in the focus groups talked about the potential value of groups for field educators to meet together. Different approaches were discussed, including degrees of formality, the connection with supervision, and the need for homogeneity or variety of experience. These groups were also identified as potential opportunities for connecting with mentors who then might meet outside of the group. Time pressures were recognised as a significant barrier to both of these initiatives but online forums and resources were suggested as a possible solution. Professional learning communities have been proposed as the most significant hope for improving education outcomes in recent years (Mitchell & Sackney, 2011; Stoll & Seashore, 2007) and this model appears to offer a useful framework for field education. The development of a professional learning community, both face-to-face and online, was a clear recommendation of participants in this research as a way to catalyse the transformation of practice.

The integrated model of professional socialisation that I adopted in this research (Miller, 2010), incorporating insights from both structural functionalism and symbolic interactionism, highlights the role of both formal learning processes and social dynamics. In addition to the recommendations related to community interaction, participants discussed the importance of professional development and formal qualifications for field educators. These initiatives were proposed not only to develop practitioner competence but also as a method of raising the profile and recognition of the importance of the work. Participants identified the significance of leadership but emphasised that the transformation of field education will require a partnership between field educators, social work agencies, academic institutions and students. Although the development of an active field education community of practice is a key recommendation from this research, the importance of balancing this against formal education, professional development and professional recognition is also emphasised. Field educator agency and collaboration is a critical part of the transformation of practice, but the role of academic institutions, social service agencies and professional bodies is no less important.

# 8 Discussion and Conclusion

In the previous three chapters, I presented and discussed the findings from my research with field educators; in this chapter, I now explore how the findings help answer the questions I posed for this inquiry. I highlight specific connections with the literature and theory that I discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, and in light of these relationships identify a number of conclusions that illuminate the original research questions. I present a model for a collective approach to field education development, based on the conclusions outlined in this chapter. I propose several implications for field education practice, along with a series of questions to guide further research. I conclude the chapter with some thoughts on the contribution that this research makes to the academic conversation about field education.

I began this research with a strong sense of the importance of field education in the professional socialisation journey of social workers and a belief that it is the primary method for students to both learn and demonstrate competent practice (Boitel & Fromm, 2014). Although there has been significant research into the factors that influence the experience of students on placement (Bogo, 2006), I was specifically interested in the role of field educators and the factors that influence their practice. From my professional experience, I was aware that concerns had existed for some time about the quality and quantity of student placements in Aotearoa (TEC, 2009); issues that have been further exacerbated by several years of growth in enrolments in social work programmes (SWRB, 2016b). During the period in which this research took place, I was

also involved in the development of professional guidelines for field educators (ANZASW, 2016) and the exploration of collaborative training initiatives to support practitioners in responding to this framework. The objective of the research was therefore to explore the professional socialisation of field educators, the factors that influence their practice, and possible avenues for developing the quality of their work.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the literature on professional socialisation provides two key perspectives on the journey to becoming a field educator, structural functionalism and symbolic interactionism. According to the dominant structural-functionalist perspective (Barretti, 2004b), social workers adopt the role of a field educator through a process of learning from experts, in a relatively uncontested stepwise fashion. Responses to concerns about the quality and quantity of field education would, therefore, be likely to take the form of increasing the availability of a standardised education programme and encouraging more practitioners to participate. Indeed, this characterises the current focus within Aotearoa. It appears that the dominant conversation in the social work education community is based on an individualised problem model, seeking to address issues of personal motivation, teaching competence and continued professional development. Despite the present focus on individual field educators, evidence also suggests that other factors may play an influential role in shaping practice. Maidment's (2000b) research from almost two decades ago indicates that there are significant "contextual influences" (p. 113) on practice, including field educator motivation, placement agency support and academic institution guidance. These findings are consistent with the second key perspective on professional socialisation, symbolic interactionism, which anticipates conflict and tension in the process of professional learning. Miller's (2010) integrated model helps to synthesise these contrasting perspectives on professional socialisation, highlighting the need to explore some of the broader environmental influences on field educator practice, alongside their educational learning.

The starting place for this research was informed by this broad perspective on field educator professional socialisation. I was interested in exploring beyond the standard focus on the education and professional development of individual field educators, to consider other influences on practice. Activity Theory, as outlined in Chapter 3, provided a lens that highlighted a range of factors influencing practice, but also helped me to expand my vision from an individual focus, and to consider a collective activity perspective. Rather than simply viewing the challenges facing field education as related

to individual practitioner competence, I began to see that the issues relate to how the activity system learns and ultimately transforms itself. From this viewpoint, the development of field education is less about individual professional development and more about engaging practitioners who share a common goal in a process of finding solutions to the problems they face in realising that objective.

This contrast between an individual and collective perspective was illustrated during an impromptu conversation with an experienced social worker towards the end of this research (Personal communication, June 30, 2017)[29]. I noted in my research journal that the practitioner had previously worked for an academic institution as a field education co-ordinator, but at the time was working for a small non-government agency. Due to her previous experience as an educator, this social worker had certainly developed a strong perspective on teaching and learning in field education and had the necessary competence to excel as a field educator. However, during the conversation, she said that she would not offer a student placement in her present role because she knew the workload challenges involved and would not be adequately supported by her employer. This illustrates how contextual factors impact on the quality of field education delivery, regardless of the competence of the field educator to provide an excellent learning experience for a student. This social worker was pointing out some of the tensions field educators are required to manage and the barriers to challenging these contextual factors on an individual basis. Unfortunately, despite her commitment to students, this practitioner had decided she could not engage in field education due to her marginalised position in her work setting and the lack of support she would receive. This example highlights the central argument of this thesis: that field educators should be engaged as a collective in finding solutions to tensions created by the factors that influence their work.

I posed the following three questions at the beginning of this research:

- What factors do social workers in Canterbury, Aotearoa New Zealand, report as influencing their learning to practice as field educators?

[29] Name removed to protect confidentiality due to the comments relating to the individual's workplace.

- What factors do social work field educators in Canterbury, Aotearoa New Zealand, report as influencing field education practice?

- What opportunities do social work field educators in Canterbury, Aotearoa New Zealand, identify for the development of field education practice.

In the following discussion, I explain how I have answered these questions by using activity theory, critical pragmatism and professional learning community models to analyse the data.

## 8.1 Activity System Tensions

Using activity theory as an analysis tool helped me to answer the first two research questions about the influences on the process of learning to be a field educator and on their practice with students. I identified four key themes during analysis of the individual and group interviews: different views about the object of field education, disturbances in the division of labour, competing rules for practice and a range of influences on the tools used to achieve the objective. These findings resonate with previous research both with social workers and with other professional groups, but the emphasis of the present research is the way that these themes indicate tensions in the activity of field education. This analysis was discussed in Chapter 5, highlighting the potential for expansive learning (Engeström, 1987), and a number of tentative conclusions can be drawn from these findings that help answer the first two research questions.

The first conclusion is that there are multiple conflicting objects (see Foot, 2002) of field education, and therefore, there are a range of motivating influences to engage in this work. At least three key ideas about the object of field education were evident in the data analysed in this research: professionalism, workforce needs and learning. Participants described a sense of professional responsibility to repay the investment that others made in their own education as a social worker. This responsibility is not specifically identified within the current professional competence standards for social workers in Aotearoa (SWRB, 2015), but it seemed that participants considered it to be common sense or a moral truism. This feeling of professional responsibility was not only present when participants recalled positive experiences; some were also motivated to prevent future students from experiencing the things that happened during their own placements that they perceived as negative. Similar ideas about field education being a

professional responsibility have been identified in other studies in social work (Maidment, 2000b), occupational therapy (Thomas et al., 2007), physiotherapy (Öhman et al., 2005) and dietetics (Hasseberg, 2003). In addition to the sense of professional responsibility, field educators value the professional development advantages of working with students (Develin & Mathews, 2008; Shardlow et al., 2002). The primary benefit identified by participants in the present study related to the way students stimulate field educators to reflect on the relationship between theory and practice.

In contrast to these personal motivational influences, field educators are often influenced by their employers' view of students as a workforce resource (Maidment, 2000b; Thomas et al., 2007). This perspective had both a short and long-term expression in the present research. Participants explained that students are often used as an extra pair of hands to help achieve the team's immediate objectives; some participants saw this as a reasonable repayment for the disruption of providing a placement. Participants also said that field education is often viewed as a recruitment strategy and an opportunity to promote the work of the agency.

The final view of the object of field education originates with the academic institutions. From this perspective, field education is a protected learning space where students learn to integrate theory and practice. Participants in this study described their pleasure in seeing the growth and development of students and feeling that they made a contribution to this learning process; findings similar to those with nurses (Rebholz, 2013) and teachers (Trevethan, 2013).

Although these different field educator objectives have not previously been framed as a tension, the findings in this research are consistent with the range of motivating factors identified in other studies. Participants in the present enquiry gave examples of balancing the demands of these different views about the object of field education, indicating a tension that has been present within the activity system for some time.

The second key tension identified in this research relates to the disturbances in the division of labour that were described by participants, experienced as a lack of support from colleagues within the agency context, or auditing from field liaison staff. Field educators certainly receive support from their managers or colleagues, but this can be unreliable or inadequate (Maidment, 2000b; Öhman et al., 2005; Rebholz, 2013). Workload is a key indicator for field educators of whether they are supported by their

manager and organisation to undertake field education (Hay et al., 2006; Perry & Maher, 2003; Waterhouse et al., 2011), and yet participants in the present research said that it was a common expectation for field education work to be completed on top of their normal responsibilities. The second example of this tension related to the division of labour is associated with the role of the field liaison staff. Some field liaison staff provide excellent support and guidance for field educators but others can be overly focused on student needs and overlook the help that field educators require (Urdang, 1999). Participants in the present research suggested that this problem can lead to a lack of trust and some were anxious about potential repercussions if they failed to meet certain unclear standards. Although the experience of these disturbances in the guidance and support provided to field educators varies, their presence, in both this study and previous research, indicates an area of tension in the activity system that needs to be resolved.

Participants in this research also described the challenge of working with management policies and a risk discourse within social service agencies, on the one hand, and balancing the need for universal or tailored academic policies and assessments, on the other. Previous research has not specifically addressed the impact of agency policies or procedures, but Trevethan (2013) identified the influence of the materials provided by academic institutions on field educators in teaching contexts. This third area of tension in the activity system relates to the rules used to guide the work. Participants in the present research identified a general absence of specific policies and procedures within social service agencies that relate to working with students. In response to this, management and human resources policies were influential processes but also created challenges because they failed to reflect the needs of field education. Unwritten rules about the appropriate level of risk that clients and students should be exposed to were also influential in the present study, although these expectations were often ignored when the pragmatic demands of the workplace dictated. Participants gave examples of their work to manage the expectations of academic institutions about the activities that should take place during a placement, even though these did not always fit easily into the workplace. The variety of requirements from different academic institutions was a further challenge for field educators to manage. The overall lack of clarity and consistency about the rules that govern field education appears to be a tension that has remained present over an extended period.

The final conclusion that I draw from this analysis is that the mediating tools used by field educators are also shaped by the influence of the agency context, the academic institution and the individual practitioner. Three different approaches dominated the descriptions from participants, driven by ideas related to apprenticeship, assessment, or personal creativity. Participants in this research used the work tasks in their agency as a structure within placements, moving students from observation to increasing independence in the work. Providing students with a variety of tasks and exposing them to as much of the social work process as possible was generally seen as valuable. Although this has not been emphasised in previous research, the influence of work experiences, presumably including work tasks, has certainly been suggested (e.g. Trevethan, 2013). The second major influence on the teaching process identified by participants in the current research is the assessment structure provided by the academic institution. Participants sought to work within the assessment requirements but did not always feel confident in their understanding or ability as an assessor, a limitation also noted by other researchers (e.g. Murdock et al., 2006; Vinton & Wilke, 2011; Waterhouse et al., 2011). In addition to an apprentice or assessment-driven model of field education, individual creativity was a significant feature in the data in the present study. Field educators drew on experiences from throughout their life, as a student and as a professional to develop ideas about how to work with students (Dettlaff & Dietz, 2004; Rebholz, 2013; Trevethan, 2013). These influences were utilised in a trial and error approach to find effective ways to work with students and develop individual practice over time.

In summary, the tensions in the field education activity system that I have identified through this research are significant influences on the professional development and practice of social work field educators in Canterbury, Aotearoa New Zealand. These findings help to answer my first two research questions. The uncertainty about the object of field education; the variable support from managers, colleague and academic staff; the competing organisational and academic rules; and the trial and error approach to developing practice all impact on the process of learning to be a field educator and the way in which the work is undertaken.

The consistency of these findings with previous research indicates that the different influences on the object, division of labour, rules and tools of field education can be identified with some confidence. These influences have not previously been understood as in tension, but rather as simply coexisting. Previous research has focused on the

relationships between the field educator and student, academic staff, colleagues or managers. In the present research, the focus has been on the activity of field education and the relationship with other activity systems, rather than on the individual practitioner and their relationships. Taking an activity theory viewpoint, the influences on these interactions have been framed as tensions, or areas of conflict that might catalyse transformational change. Individual field educators may have quite different experiences of the tensions that have been identified. Indeed, participants in this study provided both positive and negative examples of all of the challenges that have been discussed. However, the purpose of this analysis is not to describe universal experiences of field educators but rather to identify disruptions in the familiar that indicate the possibility for expansive learning. The presence of four key areas of tension suggests that field educators in Canterbury, Aotearoa, are managing a number of complex influences that potentially could result in a rethinking of how work with students is undertaken. However, the enduring historical presence of these tensions raises questions about the lack of transformation. The delay in significant change being initiated suggests the presence of a number of barriers that counter the drive towards new learning.

## 8.2 Marginalisation as a Barrier

Although activity theory helped me to identify the presence of tensions in field education, it did not explain the lack of response to the supposed catalysts for change. This resistance to transformational learning suggested the presence of other influences on the process of learning to be a field educator and on their practice with students. The apparent suggestion within activity theory that members of an activity system will always seek to resolve disturbances and tensions has been identified as a limitation of the model (Young, 2001). In this sense, activity theory does not fully explain the persistence of tensions within field education and the apparent lack of change. However, by adopting a critical pragmatist (Kadlec, 2007) stance, as discussed in Chapter 3, possible power dynamics were identified that might explain the resistance to change. The influence of power and marginalisation was identified within the descriptions that participants provided of their attempts to manage competing demands in their work. The persistence of a monocultural pedagogy within field education was a concerning example of how the marginal position of field educators in relation to social work practice agencies and academic institutions appears to inhibit expansive learning. This

analysis was focused on answering the first two research questions and was discussed in detail in Chapter 6. It also revealed a number of conclusions about the reasons why the historical presence of tensions has not sufficiently disrupted field educator practice.

The challenge for field educators in trying to balance a number of competing influences on their practice acts as a barrier to a reconsideration of approaches to practice. The work of participants in this research to manage these competing influences appeared to exacerbate their already marginal position. Gursanski and Le Sueur (2012) argue that field educators occupy a peripheral position in relation to their place in the social services work context and the academic arena. Participants in my research gave examples of their attempts to integrate the demands of education with those of practice, suggesting that there may be significant implications for their position. However, the relationship with practice and academia is not the only expression of power. The role of the field educator has inherent power relationships that must be considered (Clark et al., 2010). In my research, these power dimensions expressed themselves in participants' attempts to balance a sense of responsibility with ideas of authority.

The integration of theory and practice is a significant challenge that places field educators between two powerful systems: their employing organisation and the academic institution. Four examples of the influence of these two systems were identified in this research. Firstly, participants described their attempts to translate the theory promoted by academic institutions into the practise context that the student is located in. This task has been identified as a significant challenge for field educators (Murdock et al., 2006) and an area of professional development need (Dettlaff & Dietz, 2004; Fernandez, 2003). Field education can also be seen as a drain on staff time (Jarman-Rohde et al., 1997) a burden (Maidment, 2000b), or a risk to be managed (Pack, 2011), again placing field educators on the margins of their team. Participants in my research suggested that they advocated for the importance of teaching students in practice settings even though organisations and managers may be resistant. This challenge extended to the placement itself, as participants attempted to balance the demands for productivity with the need for students to have sufficient space for learning. The final example of balancing education and practice was evident in participants' stories of matching students with colleagues who would support their learning, a task that sometimes required keeping certain colleagues away from students. In each of these examples, the field educator can find themselves on the margins of one system or the other as they seek to integrate two different sets of priorities. Analysis of

the data suggests that this experience of marginalisation can result in field educators lacking the energy to address some of the tensions within the way in which field education is practised.

Personal experiences of the power inherent in the field educator role is a second theme related to the challenge of balancing competing influences. Students recognise the presence of power in their relationships with field educators and value a shared power model where they can challenge examples of poor practice (Moorhouse et al., 2014). It is particularly important to acknowledge the power involved in field education with indigenous students (Zuchowski et al., 2013). Participants in my research were generally focused on providing support to students, but at the same time recognised the need to also challenge students to step outside their comfort zone, necessitating the exertion of power. Ironically, protecting students can also invite exertion of control over colleagues who may value the utility of students more than their learning. A similar dynamic was also described by participants in this research in their concern to protect clients, which placed field educators in a position of controlling the actions of students. The most extreme example of balancing competing influences seen in the data was the maintenance of a supportive stance towards students and a resistance of the potential within the agency to exploit them in some way. Although field education may primarily be seen as a benevolent activity, practitioners are also faced with decisions about how to exercise the power required in their role. Negotiating this tension between a responsibility for students and the necessary authority of the role is perhaps a familiar challenge for social workers. However, it is also psychologically demanding, leaving little room for engaging in a reconsideration of field education practice.

The dominance of a monocultural pedagogy, evident in the present research, is a striking example of the impact of the marginalisation of field educators. Razack (2002) has argued that power and oppression are a feature of field education that practitioners must consciously address. The importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the need for social workers to have cultural competence to work with Māori are well established and indigenous models of practice are growing in influence (Munford & Sanders, 2011). Indeed, the findings from this current study indicate that field educators are aware of the importance of engaging students in activities that expose them to bicultural models and approaches to practice. Participants described using creative methods for exploring these issues with students despite the lack of support they may receive from their employers. However, evidence of the influence of kaupapa Māori pedagogy on field

educator practice was extremely limited in the data. Participants suggested that Māori principles were implicit in the way that they worked, but did not describe their engagement in the development of explicitly bicultural models of field education. Lack of management support, the lack of time and workload pressures were all identified as barriers to participating in work to develop bicultural practice. Each of these barriers is an example of the marginal position of field educators within their work teams and the lack of value placed on their work as educators. This places field educators in a position where they are unlikely to participate in the work of addressing the tensions and areas requiring development in field education.

These findings provide further answers to my first two research questions and help explain the lack of transformation in response to the tensions in the activity system. The power dimensions in field education are significant influences on the learning and practice of field educators. Practitioners attempt to balance the competing demands of practice and education activity systems, and also wrestle to equalise the authority and responsibility inherent in their role. Field educators can find themselves in a marginalised position both in relation to social service agency contexts and academic institutions. This marginalised position is likely to make it difficult for practitioners to challenge current practice without support and a recognition of the challenging nature of their work. The individual challenge of taking a position between responsibility and authority creates further psychological demands that can be a barrier to engagement with change. Recognising these barriers is an important step in beginning to consider ways that they might be overcome so that the tensions embedded in the activity system can be addressed.

## 8.3 Community Responses

A significant feature emerging from my analysis of the interviews conducted in this research was the repeated reference to the concept of community. Collegial support is an important factor in the development of a field educator professional identity (McAllister, 2001) and yet practitioners often describe their sense of isolation (Rebholz, 2013). In my research, participants described their sense of disconnection from other field educators and suggested that this had worsened over time. The lack of collective engagement was evident in the data by the absence of examples of cooperative work to clarify the object of field education. Despite the challenge of competing views about the purpose of field education, participants did not identify any collective response to

address this tension. A similar situation was also evident in relation to the multiple influences on the rules and tools employed by field educators. Dominant constructs from social work practice on the one hand, and education on the other, were not challenged by the field educator community. These findings suggest that participants were alienated from the field educator community and their identity as a field educator might, therefore, be underdeveloped. This lack of mutual engagement could be interpreted as the absence of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) and therefore might remain a static feature of field education. However, an activity theory perspective suggests that field education is by definition a collective activity and therefore open to stimulation to achieve change.

In light of the power dynamics that act as barriers to the transformation of field education, I explored ways that the disturbances in the activity system might be stimulated further to catalyse expansive learning. The purpose of this part of the investigation was to answer my third research question by exploring the opportunities that participants identified for the development of field education. The tensions identified in the initial data set were presented to participants in a series of five focus groups that initiated discussions about how to address the disruptions in the activity system. This approach was similar to Engeström's (2000b) model of a "boundary crossing laboratory" (p. 965), which involves stakeholders exploring possible solutions to contradictions in an activity system that have been presented by researchers. Within the scope of my research, it was not possible to follow the full model suggested by Engeström and track the implementation of the ideas presented in the focus groups, but the discussions did identify a number of potential developmental solutions. The development of community support for field educators was a frequent recommendation among participants, consistent with Trevethan's (2013) findings that field educators in teaching indicated a desire to participate in a community of practice. The value of peer learning for field educators has been identified in previous research by Dettlaff and Dietz (2004) and Waterhouse et al. (2011). Specific initiatives have also been reported in Canada (Bogo & Power, 1995), America (Barlow et al., 2004; Finch & Feigelman, 2008) and Northern Ireland (Douglas & Magee, 2012). Participants in my research also suggested that community engagement could partially be conducted online and might be used to identify mentors that could meet separately to the group. The concept of a professional learning community (Stoll & Seashore, 2007), which has become popular

in education, is a useful framework for conceptualising the recommendations made by participants in this present research.

Interestingly, participants in my research also connected their ideas about a professional learning community to recommendations for education and continued professional development for field educators. The education needs of field educators have been identified in previous research and include knowledge and skills related to teaching and learning (Ellis, 1998); assessment (Murdock et al., 2006); integrating theory and practice (Murdock et al., 2006); working with disabilities (Fernandez, 2003); and the purpose, structure and expectations of the programme (Dettlaff & Dietz, 2004). Participants in the present research suggested that learning needs could be identified in a professional community and then delivered in partnership with an academic institution. The provision of educational pathways, possibly including post-graduate qualifications, was identified as a method for increasing the recognition of field education as an important activity, once again suggesting the marginalisation felt by field educators. Partnerships between field educators, students, academic institutions and employers were seen as important strategies.

These findings provide answers to my third research question. Field educators identify the potential value of developing a stronger field educator community, the importance of linking training and professional development to this collective and the need for partnerships between all the key players in field education. These ideas are perhaps ways of addressing the marginalisation and isolation of field educators so that the field educator community is seen as an equal partner, able to play a significant role in the development of practice.

## 8.4 Field Education Professional Learning Community Model

The findings from this research suggest that there are a number of tensions that field educators experience in their work that potentially could catalyse transformational change. However, the marginalised position of field educators in relation to the academy and their own work setting, along with their alienation from other field educators results in resistance to expansive learning. Despite these challenges, participants indicated their interest in participating in a professional learning community that could lead to the reconceptualisation of aspects of their practice. The critical need to support individual field educators to incorporate kaupapa Māori pedagogy into their

practice is an example of the kind of challenge that a professional learning community might address. Figure 8-1 illustrates how a continuous learning process might be initiated through a professional learning community that integrates individual and community learning cycles.

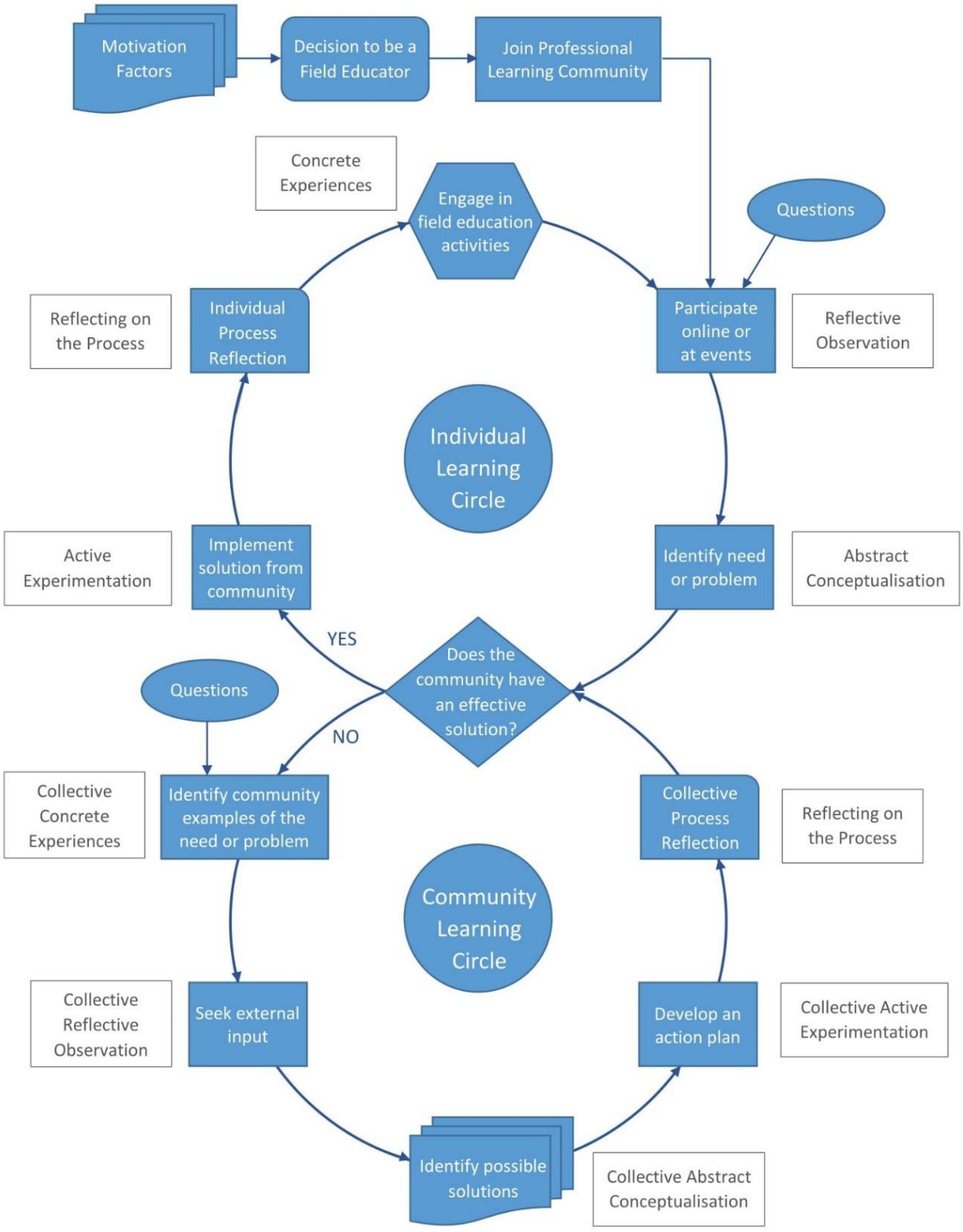


***Figure 8-1: Field education learning community model.***

The field education learning community model, schematically depicted in Figure 8-1, is an adaptation of Kolb's (2015) learning circle. Kolb theorises learning as a process involving four steps: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Engeström (2000b) has also proposed a learning cycle evident in a boundary crossing laboratory. In this model, there are seven steps that might be thought of as a more detailed version of Kolb's cycle. Engeström's model begins with questioning the tensions evident in the concrete experiences investigated by the researchers. Participants are then engaged in both historical and empirical analysis, in other words, a process of reflection. The third and fourth stages in Engeström's learning process involve modelling new solutions and examining the new model, corresponding to Kolb's abstract conceptualisation. This is followed by an implementation phase that involves active experimentation. Engeström includes two final steps, reflecting on the process and consolidating the new practice, which do not feature in Kolb's model. Although these final stages might be conceptualised by Kolb as the beginning of another learning cycle, he does appear to minimise the importance of evaluating the learning process itself. The field education learning community model is an amalgamation of these two theories and includes five steps that align with concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation, followed by an additional step of process reflection. An individual learning circle is connected to a community learning circle through a central question about whether the community holds the experiential knowledge to inform individual learning. I now explain the model by applying it to the learning journey of a new field educator.

The field education learning community model begins with a number of motivating influences on an individual social worker. Research has shown that there are a number of different factors that motivate an individual to consider becoming a field educator: personal life experiences that result in a passion for learning or teaching, positive or negative placement experiences, a sense of professional responsibility, an organisational culture that promotes teaching, or a request from an academic institution that the field educator feels loyalty towards. Regardless of the specific mix of factors, the social worker at some point decides to become a field educator. At present, this would result in a process of engaging with an academic institution, possibly completing some training and interviewing a student for a placement. This process results in an experience of relative isolation from the beginning of the professional development journey. In the

field education learning model the social worker would first engage with the field educator community, either at face-to-face events or through an online platform. This would create a form of "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 34) that could potentially continue for an extended period before actually engaging with a student. Through participation and reflection in the learning community, a new field educator may quickly identify their need for professional development before working with a student. This should lead to the exploration of the preparation activities that the community has access to and an appropriate resource, such as an online learning module, would be identified through discussion with colleagues. This process may not require further consideration by the wider learning community and the field educator could access the professional development resources so they are prepared to offer a placement. At this stage in the model, Engeström's (2000b) additional step of reflecting on the process is incorporated; the practitioner would be encouraged to reflect on the support they have received from the learning community and whether this was effective. The final step in this individual learning circle would be the engagement in field education activities, such as co-working with a more experienced field educator, or mentoring a student.

The second learning cycle begins with the field educator reflecting on their concrete experience with students, encouraged through their participation in the professional learning community. For example, a field educator may reflect on their work with students in light of the values of the profession and identify that they lack a bicultural pedagogical framework, as highlighted in Chapter 6. Raising this problem with the professional learning community would reveal the absence of effective solutions to this problem and so members of the community would be asked to share their experiences of this area of practice. This could happen in a face to face workshop, but could also potentially take place in online forums. Once the nature of the problem has been clarified, the community members would analyse the issues, drawing on external inputs such as literature about kaupapa Māori pedagogy, or specialist expertise either within or beyond the community. This additional knowledge would then be utilised by the community to identify possible strategies for developing a bicultural model of field education. Following the development of an action plan, the community would reflect on the learning process, providing information for further cycles. Once the community has developed a solution to the identified problem or need, individual practitioners would be in a position to integrate this into their practice. Further individual reflection

on the process of participating the collective learning process is an important step in reinforcing the engagement of the field educator in the professional learning community.

One potential criticism of this model is that individual field educators may not identify the contradictions in their own practice that need to be brought to the attention of the learning community. Indeed, participants in this research did not appear to be concerned about the monoculturalism in their practice and so would be unlikely to raise this as an issue with any community they were part of. Other tensions were certainly more prominent concerns for participants, such as the lack of a reduction in their caseload in recognition of the workload of field education. It is, therefore, reasonable to suggest that some concerns would be raised with a learning community and others may require external stimulation. In Engeström's (2000b) boundary crossing laboratory this role is played by the researchers who present their observations of tensions or contradictions to the participants for consideration. This process adds weight or emphasis to issues that might otherwise be accommodated by the activity system for extended periods. This process is addressed in the field education learning community model through the introduction of two points of questioning. Firstly, queries can be raised with field educators through their participation in the professional learning community events or online forums. These might be raised by various forms of external feedback provided to the community by students, academics, employers, or professional bodies. Secondly, a specific facilitator role might be used by the professional learning community to introduce questions that the learning community is not generating itself. A group of field education academics or researchers are the most likely to adopt this role as it would require an analysis of the work of community members and external developments that may influence the future of field education. These two points of external stimulation help to overcome the tendency of systems to move towards homoeostasis, a state that would potentially result in the field education learning community providing existing solutions to new members engaged in the individual learning circle, but never raising concerns to be addressed in the community learning circle.

## 8.5 Implications for Practice and Policy

This research has highlighted the potential for expansive learning within field education. The historical presence of tensions and the challenges for individual field

educators suggest the possibility for rethinking aspects of practice. However, the study has also highlighted the barriers to achieving this change. In particular, the marginal position that field educators hold in relation to their work context and the academy, and also their alienation from a community that might collectively address the challenges. Neoliberal managerialism is likely to continue to result in field education being viewed as a resource-intensive activity that diverts both academics and practitioners away from the economic productivity objectives set by organisations. These same pressures can be expected to maintain an organisational culture focused on getting more for less and to diminish the goodwill that has been a characteristic of field education to date. The primary implication of this research is, therefore, the need to develop an active professional learning community for field educators that could resist these pressures and collectively realise the potential for transformational change. The findings from this research suggest a number of tensions that might provide an initial agenda for a field education professional learning community in Aotearoa.

The first key developmental objective indicated by this research is to address the isolation of field educators. Developing events, online platforms and mentoring to connect practitioners and engage them in an exploration of the tensions related to field education should be a priority. Not all practitioners will respond to the same kind of initiatives and so a variety of ways to engage with the community will be important. These same mechanisms could form the basis of additional guidance and support that overcomes the variability within individual contexts. At present, field educators have to manage different levels of assistance from managers, colleagues and academic staff, but a professional learning community could compensate for areas that are lacking by connecting field educators together for supplementary support.

These research findings suggest that the second area to focus on is the motivation of field educators. Participants in this study indicated a range of individual benefits, including, amongst others, the professional development of responding to questions about the rationale for practice and the sense of achievement from inspiring a new practitioner. However, these do not appear to be promoted or universally understood and a professional learning community might contribute to sharing this knowledge. Alongside these individual motivators, working with the professional association, ANZASW, to clarify the professional responsibility to contribute to the development of future social workers would be another important objective. A related goal for a professional learning community should be the integration of the competing objectives

for field education. At present individual practitioners are faced with the competing objects of the workforce needs of social service organisations and the learning needs of students. A professional learning community could seek to resolve this tension through a collaborative process to articulate a shared purpose.

The third focus of a professional learning community might be to work in partnership with employers and academic institutions to develop the systems required to promote effective practice. Specific field education policies and procedures that can be adopted by social service organisations would support the work of field educators. Although there are examples of helpful guidelines for working with students, in many organisations there is a lack of time, expertise, or inclination to develop these on an individual basis. In a similar way, collaborative efforts to create professional development opportunities, using both face-to-face and online modalities, would result in more effective delivery. Although some excellent work is underway in Aotearoa to develop collaborative education and professional development programmes for field educators, at present these initiatives lack a serious engagement with practitioners themselves. This is largely to do with the absence of an identifiable community to work with, and the development of a professional learning community could address this problem.

The final objective for a professional learning community suggested by the findings from this research is the development of new pedagogical approaches. At present much of the development of practice is taking place on an ad hoc, trial-and-error basis. A professional learning community could engage members in the identification, evaluation and dissemination of innovations in practice so that the examples of best practice are adopted more widely. An urgent need in this area is the integration of kaupapa Māori pedagogy into field education. Localised initiatives are undoubtedly in existence but at present these are not being disseminated to the wider field education community and are therefore not leading to the transformation of practice. A professional learning community has an important function in celebrating best practice and challenging field educators to expand their work to include these initiatives. It is essential that Māori field educators lead this conversation and help shape the development of kaupapa Māori pedagogy for working with student social workers during field placements.

This approach to the development of field education moves the conversation away from a focus on problems with individual field educators to the strengths within a professional learning community. It seeks to empower field educators to play a more significant role in the development of their collective practice. Rather than focusing solely on the competence of individual field educators, their training and standards for practice, the development of a community perspective would begin to address the complex range of factors that influence practice through an ongoing process of collective learning. This is not to suggest that social work academics, social service managers, professional bodies, or indeed students are not also important players in developing field education. This research has highlighted the considerable influence of each of these actors and the need for effective partnerships. Social work academics play a significant role in the preparation, professional development and support of field educators. Social service managers create the environment in which field education takes place and field educators are acknowledged. The professional bodies have an important function in promoting the professional responsibility to support student learning and to set standards for practice. The relationship with students is also critical and their feedback is an important part of developing practice. Partnerships are required between each of these groups and the field educator community. The marginalised position of field educators needs to be addressed so that the community itself can play a central function in co-ordinating the relationships and activities necessary to transform current practice.

Obvious questions arise from the suggestion to develop a field education learning community, related to who would lead this initiative, how the development work would be undertaken and how would it be funded. Although these questions are beyond the scope of this research, the findings do point to some particular considerations. Firstly, field educators themselves should play a central leadership role. This might be undertaken in partnership with field education academics but there is a risk that any developments will reinforce the experience of marginalisation unless field educators themselves are key leaders. Secondly, the methodology of change should be based on partnership, involving contributions from academics, social workers, managers and students. Thirdly, investment will be required from all the key stakeholders if the challenges facing field education are to be addressed. Field education plays a number of important functions for the profession. Students identify it is the most significant part of the education process delivered by academic institutions (Fortune & Abramson, 1993).

It contributes to the recruitment process for social services employers. It is a critical part of the socialisation process that professional bodies are concerned with. Investment in the transformation of field education should, therefore, be undertaken collectively to benefit the whole profession. Although significant obstacles will need to be overcome if an active professional learning community for field educators is to be developed, the potential benefit for the transformation of field education surely warrants the effort.

## 8.6 Recommendations for Research

In addition to implications for practice, the following recommendations for further research are indicated by these findings. Firstly, further research is required to evaluate the effects of developing a professional learning community for field educators. The interventionist methods of activity theorists influenced this research project (e.g. Engeström, 2000b) and the decision to share the initial analysis with field educators in a series of focus groups was an attempt to engage them in identifying possible solutions to the tensions within the activity system. The recommendations identified in this process highlight the potential value of working with groups of field educators in this way. However, the scope of the research did not allow for these ideas to be implemented and the results monitored. In this sense, the research is incomplete in that it has not followed a full developmental cycle. The findings of the research provide the foundation for the implementation and evaluation phases but further research is required to actually track these developments. Given the range of tensions identified in the field education activity system, a number of projects will be required to engage the professional learning community in addressing these tensions. Each project should be undertaken with the academic rigour required to monitor the implementation phase and evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed solutions. The work involved is therefore extensive and the failure of this research to address these steps in the developmental cycle is simply a reflection of the size of the task.

The second area for further research relates to the development of indigenous and bicultural approaches to field education. Two key projects are required, firstly to develop field education models informed by te ao Māori, and secondly to develop approaches that integrate kaupapa Māori and Pākehā pedagogy. There will be examples of local initiatives that address both these objectives; however, research is required to investigate the outcomes of introducing these models for students, field educators, field education liaison staff and clients. Research into these developments should be led by

Māori researchers, in partnership with the field educator professional learning community, and using Māori methodologies. This is a critical area of research if field education is going to truly reflect the bicultural values of the social work profession in Aotearoa.

The final recommendation for further research is to use activity theory to explore similar research questions in the context of other locations and professions. This research has specifically focused on social work field education in Canterbury, Aotearoa. The particular tensions identified in the activity system are specific to the professional and regional context of the study. However, the literature review highlights the similarities between the findings of this research and previous research, both internationally and in other professions. This suggests that similar tensions may be present in other field education activity systems, although unique features should also be expected. Activity theory offers a robust framework for analysing social work practice and education, and further research utilising this approach would contribute to the development of practice (Foot, 2014). Specifically, further enquiry informed by activity theory would provide the basis for engaging field educators in other locations in a process of identifying and addressing the unique tensions in their specific activity system.

## 8.7 Delimitations and Limitations

A number of choices during this research project established explicit boundaries for the study. This research focused on a very specific activity system: social work field education in Canterbury, Aotearoa. The objective of the study was focused on influencing the development of social work field education in this specific location and was not designed to produce generalisations for other locations or other professions. Consistent with its pragmatist foundations, the focus of the research was on the consequences of enquiry for practice, resulting in a localised study with findings that could be directly applied. This was not my starting place when I began to design the research. Initially, I was interested in social work field education across Aotearoa and was exploring ways that I could engage with practitioners in a variety of locations. However, as I began to consider the implications of these decisions, and to engage with pragmatism more deeply, I decided that a broad study may limit the application of the findings and so I chose to focus on one specific locality. This does not mean that the

results are not instructive outside of the specific focus of the study, but the findings should be applied in a critical manner.

A number of limitations should also be noted. Firstly, recruiting participants for both the individual interviews and focus groups was more difficult than anticipated and resulted in a small sample size. These difficulties are possibly a reflection of the time pressure that field educators experience, consistent with the findings from this study. Participants in the focus groups, in particular, mentioned the difficulty of finding a convenient time when everyone could participate and the challenge of getting away from the office. On three occasions participants failed to arrive at a focus group, and in one instance this resulted in the group being completely cancelled because only one person arrived. It is possible that the methods used in the research resulted in an emphasis on field educators with certain characteristics, such as being more committed or having stronger views than others. It is difficult to assess if this was the case, but the variety of both positive and negative views suggests a suitable range of participants were included. In the end, twenty field educators participated in individual interviews and a total of nineteen participants were interviewed in five focus groups. Although this is a relatively small sample, it is broadly consistent with qualitative research (Shaw & Holland, 2014). Whilst this was not a grounded theory study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), the principle of saturation was used as a guide in deciding how many interviews to undertake. However, the individual focus groups were smaller than commonly referenced in the literature (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011). This raises questions about the potential for group dynamics that would work against obtaining a range of divergent views, although some authors would argue that using small groups can promote greater depth in the discussion (Toner, 2009). The sample and focus group sizes should be taken into consideration when evaluating the findings from this research, whilst remembering that as an exploratory piece of qualitative research there is no attempt to argue for the broad generalisation of the results.

The second important limitation concerns the diversity of the participants. It is acknowledged that not every type of field education placement is represented in this study. Given the ever-changing broad range of placement types used in social work, it would be virtually impossible to cover every type of setting. Checks were made to ensure the inclusion of a range of statutory and non-statutory agencies and a variety of organisation sizes. However, some agency types were not covered, although a range of descriptions about the level of organisational support were represented. There was also

a limited range of participant characteristics, particularly in relation to culture. Māori field educators did participate in both the individual interviews and focus groups, but in limited numbers. It may be the case that if a wider group of tangata whenua practitioners were included then they may have identified a greater influence of kaupapa Māori pedagogy. However, this would not change the finding that Pākehā field educators may not be incorporating Māori approaches to learning and teaching into their practice. I have not argued that Māori field educators are not utilising indigenous knowledge, but rather, that a monocultural perspective dominates the current landscape. Therefore, although these limitations are present in the research, they have been taken into account when presenting the conclusions of the research.

## 8.8 Contribution

This research has made several contributions to the academic conversation about social work field education. Firstly, it has given voice to the experience of social workers who choose to work with students on placement. The research has shown that the participants often undertook their work isolated from other field educators and on the margins of social work teams and academic institutions. Hearing the voices of field educators about what impacts their practice is therefore important, and this study has sought to contribute to the research conversation reflected in the literature review that emphasises the practitioner perspective. Focusing on practitioner narratives has highlighted the challenges inherent in field education and the range of factors that impact on how the work is undertaken. My hope is that this thesis will help to highlight that field educators are working hard to find creative solutions to the enormous challenges of field education, and are making a significant personal investment in the future of the profession for very little reward.

The second contribution of this research is to lift the focus of the field education conversation from limitations with individual field educators to the strengthening of collective learning. I began this research at a time when there was considerable concern about the quantity of field educators to work with students and the quality of their teaching practice. Solutions to these problems have historically been sought in practitioner education, practice standards and creative placement models. Whilst these are important components of a field education system, this research set out to explore the wider range of influences on the decisions of social workers to become field educators and on the quality of their practice. My conclusion from undertaking this

research is that there are a broad range of factors that impact on individual practitioners, but, more importantly, that the field educator community itself holds the solutions to these challenges. Although field educators may be perceived as a disparate group, this does not alter the fact that they are a collection of social workers who share the experience of engaging in the activity of supporting students to learn in a practice environment. The marginalised position of this community results in the maintenance of a system that fails to mobilise the energy, creativity and collective wisdom required to find solutions to the challenges ahead. I hope that the findings from this research will result in work to develop a professional learning community that will complement current efforts to improve the competence of field educators through standards and training.

The third contribution made by this research is to shine a light on the monoculturalism that is currently dominating field educator practice. Biculturalism is a foundation stone for the social work profession in Aotearoa and an integral part of social work education programmes. Field educators are aware of the importance of providing learning opportunities for students to explore bicultural practice, and they are often creative when there is limited opportunity to work with Māori. However, kaupapa Māori models of teaching and learning are not currently being integrated into field education and so biculturalism is not something that students personally experience in the way they learn during placement. Once again, I have argued that the solutions are to be found through engagement with a professional learning community and a partnership approach between Māori and Pākehā.

The final contribution of this thesis is the application of activity theory to social work research. The use of activity theory in social work research is at an early stage of development (Foot, 2014), although it has been used in designing a social work course in America (Fire & Casstevens, 2013) and in social work practice in Denmark (Mørck, 2011). My thesis demonstrates the value of activity theory for examining social work field education and I hope will encourage its use more widely within the profession.

## 8.9 Conclusion

This research emerged from a concern with the quantity and quality of social work placements and an interest in the professional socialisation of field educators. My objective was to influence the development of field education in Canterbury, Aotearoa.

Achieving this objective necessitated the investigation of factors that influence the practice of field educators and their decisions to work with students. In particular, I sought to explore beyond the education and professional standards required of individual practitioners and to consider wider historical and contextual influences. I utilised activity theory as a heuristic framework to guide this broader exploration and to help me conceptualise the process of progressive change and transformation.

My analysis of interviews with field educators, informed by activity theory, revealed a number of tensions within the activity system, suggesting potential sites that could be stimulated to catalyse expansive learning. In particular, the conflict between the field education system and two closely related activity systems was highlighted. Field education takes place in the context of social service agencies and under the direction of academic institutions and yet there are often areas of conflict between these three activity systems. Areas of tension include different views about the object of field education, uncertain guidance and support, unclear rules and boundaries, and different ideas about the most appropriate methods to use in practice. Although this analysis indicates the potential for change, the historical stability of the system suggests the presence of barriers to expansive learning.

I also considered the power dimensions within field education as a possible explanation for the apparent stability of the tensions within the activity system. I identified two key areas of power that field educators seek to balance. Firstly, trying to meet expectations related to the influence of education and practice. This power dimension highlights the marginalisation of field educators and their experience of operating in a liminal space, given little recognition within their social services team, yet also struggling to meet the expectations of academic institutions. Secondly, I also identified personal considerations related to exercising authority and providing support as dimensions of power that must be considered. The monoculturalism evident in field education is a clear example of the impact of the marginal position of field educators and the personal management of power inherent in the role. The lack of recognition in terms of workload and time acts as a barrier to the development of bicultural field education pedagogy. At the same time, the monocultural assumptions of individual field educators resist the possibility of collective change.

The alienation of field educators from their professional community was a significant finding in this research. The weakness of the field educator community was

conceptualised in a model of field education that highlights the multiple influences on practice. Although the lack of clarity in the community is a barrier to change, it is also an indication of the possibility for development. I have presented proposals for strengthening the sense of community and engaging field educators in an expansive learning process. I have also proposed a field education learning community model, which describes the integration of personal and collective learning cycles, to provide a framework for the ongoing developmental journey.

These findings have implications for practice, primarily for the development of an active professional learning community that can take responsibility for addressing the challenges in field education. These developments would also benefit from further research to track the practical implications of these proposals. Partnerships involving field educators, social service managers, academics and professional bodies will be required to guide this change process. I have also made recommendations for further research using activity theory that will support the development of field education in other locations or professions.

Considerable work lies ahead if the challenges facing field education are to be overcome. During the discussion in the second focus group, Amy made reference to this challenge and the barriers that are frequently identified in relation to lack of time. However, she went on to suggest that moving beyond current practice and generating new ways of doing things is actually about appropriately valuing field education. Amy's words provide a pertinent challenge at the end of this research; to value field education by undertaking the difficult work that will be required to realise transformational change.

> *I know that people are really busy, and they talk about time for people to be able to do extra duties or roles, or whatever. But to me, it's really [about] valuing field education as a clear role and that we really need to put energy in there . . . it needs to develop so that we're not just going around in circles, doing the same old thing. And yeah sure, it works enough, but it really isn't that brilliant. We could be improving it, so it's much better for everybody, all the players in the scenario really (Amy, Focus Group 2 Participant).*

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# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A – ETHICS APPROVALS


HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Lynda Griffioen
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: HEC 2011/43

1 July 2011

Dominic Chilvers
School of Nursing & Human Services
PO Box 540
Christchurch 8140

Dear Dominic

The Human Ethics Committee advises that your research proposal "Cultural-historical mediation in the practice of social work field education" has been considered and approved.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 30 June 2011.

Please ensure that in the invitation letter and consent form it is clearly stated that interviews will be transcribed by a professional audio transcriber.

Best wishes for your project.

Yours sincerely

Michael Grimshaw
***Chair***
***University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee***

**University of Canterbury** Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand. **www.canterbury.ac.nz**

# Ngāi Tahu Consultation and Engagement Group

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha*
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

08/09/16

Tēnā koe, Dominic

Re: 'Cultural-historical mediation in the practice of social work field education'

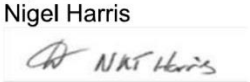
This letter is written on behalf of the Ngāi Tahu Consultation and Engagement Group. I have read and considered your proposal and acknowledge that this is a worthwhile and interesting project.

It is well considered and the researcher is clear about how they ought to take participants' (cultural) needs into account where applicable. I would like to suggest that the cultural needs of the participants for your HEC application is clear in how you will allow the participant to withdraw at any time, consent forms are available, and that if Māori are present allowing them to express their cultural through Karakia or mihi Is encouraged as well as whanau support if requested.

Thank you for engaging with the Māori consultation process. This will strengthen your research proposal, support the University's Strategy for Māori Development, and increase the likelihood of success with external engagement. It will also increase the likelihood that the outcomes of your research will be of benefit to Māori communities. We wish you all the best with phase you're your research and look forward to hearing about any future research plans.

The Ngāi Tahu Consultation and Engagement Group would appreciate a summary of your findings on completion of the current project. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Nga mihi
Nigel Harris



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HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson
Telephone: +64 03 364 2987, Extn 45588
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: HEC 2016/105

21 October 2016

Dominic Chilvers
Human Services and Social Work
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Dominic

The Human Ethics Committee advises that your research proposal "Cultural-Historical Mediation in the Practice of Social Work Field Education" has been considered and approved.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 17th October 2016.

Best wishes for your project.

Yours sincerely

*pp.* R. Robinson

Kelly Dombroski
***Chair***
***University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee***

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha*
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Rebecca Robinson
Telephone: +64 03 369 4588, Extn 94588
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: HEC 2016/105 Amendment 1

2 February 2017

Dominic Chilvers
Human Services and Social Work
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Dominic

Thank you for your request for an amendment to your research proposal "Cultural-Historical Mediation in the Practice of Social Work Field Education" as outlined in your email dated 27th January 2017.

I am pleased to advise that this request has been considered and approved by the Human Ethics Committee.

Yours sincerely

*pp.* R. Robinson

Dr Kelly Dombroski
***Deputy Chair, Human Ethics Committee***

# APPENDIX B - PHASE ONE LETTER TO INSTITUTION

**College of Arts**

Social Work and Human Services Programme
School of Social and Political Sciences
Tel: +64 3 364 2443, Fax: + 64 364 2417

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha*
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

Tuesday December 6th 2011

**Glynnis Brook**
Social Work Programme Manager
School of Nursing and Human Services
Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology
PO Box 540
Christchurch 8140

Dear Glynnis,

**Re: Research study: Cultural-Historical Mediation in the Practice of Social Work Field Education**

I am writing to seek your support for the above research and hope that you will assist in the recruitment of research participants for Phase 1 of the study.

The aim of the research project is to explore the impact that cultural-historical factors have on field educators' approach to field education. The research design is divided into two distinct phases. In Phase 1, twenty four field educators in the Canterbury region will be interviewed about their experience of being a field educator. In Phase 2 an online survey will be undertaken with field educators from across the country.

I need to recruit Social Workers from the Canterbury region who have provided field education to participate in this study. I would like to identify as many field educators as possible who have worked with CPIT since 2006. I already have access to this information as the Field Education Coordinator at CPIT but formally request your permission to forward, via post and email, a range of materials about this research project to the field educators on the CPIT database.

I have enclosed a copy of the ethics application, for your information, including samples of the documents that I would like sent to potential participants. This study has been approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology Ethics Subcommittee. Andrew Frost from the University of Canterbury School of Social and Political Sciences is supervising this study so please feel free to contact either Andrew on (03) 364 2987 ext.8449 or myself if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely,

**Dominic Chilvers**
PhD Student
dominic.chilvers@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

# APPENDIX C - PHASE ONE RECRUITMENT LETTER

**College of Arts**

Social Work and Human Services Programme
School of Social and Political Sciences
Tel: +64 3 364 2443, Fax: + 64 364 2417

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha*
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

August 14th 2012

Tena koe,

**Re: Cultural-Historical Mediation in the Practice of Social Work Field Education**

I am writing to offer you the opportunity to participate in Phase 1 of the above research project that is being supported by Christchurch Institute of Technology (CPIT) and the University of Canterbury (UC). This will involve an individual in depth interview about your experience of being a field educator.

The aim of the research project is to examine the different factors that influence the approach that field educators have to field education. This will include examining the underlying objectives, the tools used, the support from managers and colleagues, the professional development undertaken, the influence of history and prior experience, and the awareness of future challenges and change. The research design is divided into two distinct phases. In Phase 1, twenty four field educators in the Canterbury region will be interviewed about their experience of being a field educator. In Phase 2 an online survey will be undertaken with a wider group of field educators.

Participation in Phase 1 of the study is entirely voluntary and you will have the right to withdraw at any stage prior to the commencement of Phase 2. I recognise that you may well know me in my role as a Lecturer at CPIT but I assure you that this research will be conducted in such a way that your confidentiality and anonymity will be protected and will have no bearing on any work you may do with CPIT. This is explained in the attached information sheet. If you choose to participate then CPIT and UC will not be provided with details of your individual responses during the interview.

I have enclosed an information sheet to explain the study in more detail. If you wish to participate then please complete and return the reply slip at the end of the information sheet and I will be in touch regarding arrangements for the interview. If you do not wish to be contacted further in relation to this study then please email me and you will be removed from the list of potential participants. This study has been approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology Ethics Subcommittee. Andrew Frost from the University of Canterbury School of Social and Political Sciences is supervising this research so please feel free to contact either Andrew on (03) 364 2987 ext.8449 or myself if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely,

**Dominic Chilvers**
PhD Candidate
Dominic.chilvers@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

# APPENDIX D - FOCUS GROUP INVITATION TO PHASE ONE PARTICIPANT.

EMAIL

**Re: Research study: Cultural-Historical Mediation in the Practice of Social Work Field Education**

Dear *Phase 1 Participant Name*,

Further to your involvement in Phase 1 of this project, I am writing to offer you the opportunity to participate in Phase 2.

You will remember that Phase 1 of this project involved individual interviews with Field Educators. These interviews have been analysed and some theoretical ideas developed about the factors that influence field education practice. In Phase 2 a series of focus groups are being conducted to discuss findings from Phase 1 and identify appropriate professional responses.

Participation in Phase 2 of the study is entirely voluntary and you will have the right to withdraw at any stage prior to commencement of the focus group. You are welcome to bring whānau support with you to the focus group. I assure you that your participation in a focus group will have no impact on any work you may do with the Ara Institute of Canterbury or the University of Canterbury. If you choose to participate then your responses during the focus group will not be identified on an individual basis.

I have enclosed an information sheet to explain the study in more detail. If you wish to participate then please email dominic.chilvers@pg.canterbury.ac.nz and I will be in touch with you regarding arrangements for the focus group. If you do not wish to be contacted further in relation to this study then please feel free to email me and you will be removed from the list of potential participants.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and any complaints should be addressed to the Chair, Human Ethics Committee at human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz. Dr Andrew Frost, Central Queensland University and Assoc. Professor Jane Maidment, University of Canterbury are supervising this study so please feel free to contact me or Andrew (+617 4940 3320) or Jane (03 364 2987 ext. 7499) if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely,

**Dominic Chilvers**
PhD Candidate
University of Canterbury
dominic.chilvers@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

# APPENDIX E - PHASE TWO LETTER TO INSTITUTION

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha*
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

HUMAN SERVICES AND SOCIAL WORK
Telephone: +64 3664 2976
Email: dominic.chilvers@pg.cantebury.ac.nz

26 October 2016

**Yvonne Crichton-Hill**
Head of Department,
Human Services and Social Work Department,
School of Language, Social and Political Sciences,
University of Canterbury,
Private Bag 4800,
Christchurch 8140.

Dear Yvonne,

**Re: Research study:**
**Cultural-Historical Mediation in the Practice of Social Work Field Education**

I am writing to seek your support for the above research in the hope that the Human Services and Social Work Department at the University of Canterbury will assist in the recruitment of research participants for Phase 2 of the study.

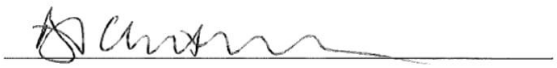
The aim of the research project is to explore the impact that cultural-historical factors have on field educators' approach to field education. The research design is divided into two distinct phases. In Phase 1, twenty field educators in the Canterbury region were interviewed about their experience of being a field educator. In Phase 2 four to eight focus groups will be undertaken with the original participants, plus further field educators in the Canterbury region, to discuss the findings from Phase 1 and identify appropriate professional responses.

I need to recruit Social Workers from the Canterbury region who have provided field education to participate in this study. I would like to identify all those field educators who have worked with the University of Canterbury since 2009. I do not require contact details for potential participants but would be grateful if you could identify a member of staff who can assist in forwarding via email a range of materials that I will supply.

I have enclosed a copy of the ethics application for your information, including samples of the documents that I would like sent to potential participants. This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee (HEC 2016/105) and participants should address any complaints to the Deputy Chair, Human Ethics Committee at

human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz. Assoc. Professor Jane Maidment, University of Canterbury and Dr Andrew Frost, Central Queensland University and are supervising this study so please feel free to contact me or Jane (03 364 2987 ext. 7499) or Andrew (+617 4940 3320) or if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely,



**Dominic Chilvers**
PhD Candidate
University of Canterbury
dominic.chilvers@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
022 024 4597

Encl: Human Ethics Committee Application

# APPENDIX F - PHASE TWO RECRUITMENT EMAIL

EMAIL

**Re: Research study: Cultural-Historical Mediation in the Practice of Social Work Field Education**

Dear *Name*,

The Human Services and Social Work Department at the University of Canterbury/Ara Institute of Canterbury is supporting the above study, which is being undertaken by Dominic Chilvers as part of his PhD research. Dominic was previously the BSW Programme Leader and Field Education Coordinator at the Ara Institute of Canterbury and you may well know him through your work as a Field Educator. I am writing to provide you with details of Dominic's research and to offer you the opportunity to participate in a focus group.

The aim of the research project is to examine the different factors that influence the approach that field educators have to field education. The research design is divided into two distinct phases. In Phase 1, twenty Field Educators in the Canterbury region were interviewed about their experience of being a field educator. In Phase 2 a series of focus groups are being conducted to discuss the findings from the individual interview and to identify appropriate professional responses to improve practice.

Participation in Phase 2 of the study is entirely voluntary and you will have the right to withdraw at any stage prior to commencement of the focus group. You are welcome to bring whānau support with you to the focus group. Your participation in a focus group will have no impact on any work you may do as a Field Educator and none of your responses will be identified on an individual basis in any presentation or report of findings.

I have attached an information sheet to explain the study in more detail. If you wish to participate then please email Dominic at dominic.chilvers@pg.canterbury.ac.nz and he will be in touch with you regarding arrangements for the focus group. If you do not wish to be contacted further in relation to this study then please feel free to email me and you will be removed from the list of potential participants.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and participants should address any complaints to the Deputy Chair, Human Ethics Committee at human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz. Assoc. Professor Jane Maidment, University of Canterbury and Dr Andrew Frost, Central Queensland University and are supervising this study so please feel free to contact me or Jane (03 364 2987 ext. 7499) or Andrew (+617 4940 3320) or if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely,

**Academic Staff Member**
Academic Institution

# APPENDIX G - PHASE TWO LETTER AGENCY

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha*
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

February 22nd 2017

Rose Henderson
Director of Allied Health,
Specialist Mental Health Services,
Canterbury District Health Board,
Hillmorton Hospital,
Private Bag 4733,
Christchurch 8140.

Dear Rose,

Re: Research study:
Cultural-Historical Mediation in the Practice of Social Work Field Education

I am writing to seek your support for the above research in the hope that the Specialist Mental Health Services will assist in the recruitment of research participants for a focus group at Hillmorton Hospital.

The aim of the research project is to explore the impact that cultural-historical factors have on field educators' approach to field education. The research design is divided into two distinct phases. In Phase 1, twenty field educators in the Canterbury region were interviewed about their experience of being a field educator. In Phase 2 four to eight focus groups will be undertaken with the original participants, plus further field educators in the Canterbury region, to discuss the findings from Phase 1 and identify appropriate professional responses.

I hope to recruit field educators who have worked with students at any time since 2009 and who would be willing to participate in a focus group. I do not require contact details for potential participants but would be grateful if you could identify a member of staff who can assist in forwarding via email a range of materials that I will supply. The focus group would be held at Hillmorton Hospital to minimise disruption for participants.

I have enclosed a copy of the ethics application for your information, including samples of the documents that I would like sent to potential participants. This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and participants should address any complaints to the Deputy Chair, Human Ethics Committee at human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz. Assoc. Professor Jane Maidment, University of Canterbury and Dr Andrew Frost, Central Queensland University and are supervising this study so please feel free to contact me or Jane (03 364 2987 ext. 7499) or Andrew (+617 4940 3320) or if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely,

Dominic Chilvers
PhD Candidate
University of Canterbury
dominic.chilvers@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

# APPENDIX H - PHASE ONE PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

## Cultural-Historical Mediation in the Practice of Social Work Field Education

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

***What is the aim of this research?***

The aim of the research project is to explore the impact that cultural-historical factors have on field educators' approach to field education.

***Has the research received ethics approval?***

This research has been approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. Andrew Frost from the University of Canterbury School of Social and Political Sciences is supervising the research and he can be contacted on (03) 364 2987 ext.8449 or Andrew.frost@canterbury.ac.nz. In addition the study has also been approved by the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology Ethics Subcommittee. Any queries regarding this approval can be directed to Judy Yarwood, Research Leader, School of Nursing and Human Services, Telephone: 03 940 8280 email: judy.yarwood@cpit.ac.nz.

***Who can participate in Phase 1?***

Any Social Worker who has provided field education at any time since 2006 for students from the University of Canterbury or Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology may participate in Phase 1 of the research.

***What is involved in participating in Phase 1?***

In Phase 1, twenty four participants will be interviewed by the researcher about their experience of being a field educator. Interviews will be held in a location that is convenient for the participant and take no longer than 90 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by professional transcribers. Participants will have the opportunity to review the transcriptions before any analysis is undertaken.

Unfortunately, due to limited places it cannot be guaranteed that you will be able to participate even if you express an interest in the study. Participants will be selected to achieve representation from both large and small statutory and non government agencies. If you are not selected then you will receive a letter explaining this decision but you will still have the opportunity to participate in Phase 2 by completing an online survey.

***Are there any risks in participating?***

There should be no risks to you should you choose to participate. It is recognised that some participants may be concerned that the information they provide could be used to make decisions about their suitability for being a field educator in future. Although this study is being supported by academic institutions, they will not be provided with details of the individual data collected through the interviews or survey. Academic institutions will only have access to the final research report and this will be presented in a format that ensures individual participants cannot be identified. The researcher is the Field Education Coordinator at Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology and some participants may know him in a professional capacity. However, your participation in this research will have no bearing on any work you may do with Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology.

***How will my confidentiality be protected?***

To participate in Phase 1, practitioners will be required to provide their contact details for obvious reasons. However, this information will not be made available to any third party, including other participants, without the express permission of the person involved. Interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim by professional transcribers. Copies of the transcription will be made available for participants to check prior to the data being used in any analysis. All paper and electronic information will be secured in lockable or password protected storage facilities for five years at the University of Canterbury and then destroyed.

***Is participation voluntary and how do I withdraw from the research?***

Although this research is being supported by the academic institution that you provide field education for, participation is entirely voluntary and will have no bearing on your role as a field educator. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time prior to Phase 2 of the study. Should you decide to withdraw from the study then you can do so by contacting the researcher or research supervisor (details below).

***How can I get a copy of the published results?***

At this stage specific plans for publication and dissemination of the results from this research have not been finalised. However, should you wish to receive a personal copy of the results then you should indicate this on your consent form. It is also anticipated that copies of the full thesis will be available in the University of Canterbury library.

***Who can I contact if I have further questions about this research?***

The principle researcher for this study is Dominic Chilvers, an Academic Staff Member at Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology. He is undertaking this research as part of completing a Social Work PhD through the University of Canterbury. Andrew Frost is supervising the research project on behalf of the University of Canterbury and is available to answer any queries. Dominic and Andrew can be contacted as follows:

**Dominic Chilvers**
CPIT
PO Box 540
Christchurch 8140
03 940 8052
chilversd@cpit.ac.nz

**Andrew Frost**
University of Canterbury
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch 8140
03 364 2987 ext. 8449
Andrew.frost@canterbury.ac.nz

✂----------

**Reply Slip** – Please return to Dominic Chilvers by post or email the same information

I would like to participate in Phase 1 of the research project – Cultural-historical mediation in the practice of field education. Please contact me as follows to arrange an interview:

Name:

Email:

Phone:

Address:

# APPENDIX I - INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – PHASE 1**
**Cultural-Historical Mediation in the Practice of Social Work Field Education**

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha*
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

***To participate in Phase 1 of this research study you must confirm that you agree with the following statements. Please read the statements carefully and then complete the boxes below to confirm your agreement.***

I have read and understood the information sheet provided describing the interviews for Stage 1 of the research study titled "Cultural-Historical Mediation in the Practice of Social Work Field Education".

1. I agree to participate in Phase 1 of the study by participating in an interview. I understand that the responses I provide will be treated as confidential.

2. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed and that I will have the opportunity to review the draft transcription prior to any analysis being undertaken.

3. I understand that all data from this research will be stored securely at the University of Canterbury for five years following the study and then destroyed.

4. I consent to publication and dissemination of the results of the study using any format or method selected by the principle researcher on the understanding that my identity will not be revealed.

5. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time prior to Phase 2, including withdrawing any information that I have provided to that date.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Participant's Name: | | |
| Address: | | |
| Telephone: | | |
| Email: | | |
| Do you require a copy of the final research report? (Please circle) | YES | NO |
| Signature: | | |
| Date: | | |

# APPENDIX J - INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

## Cultural-historical mediation in the practice of social work field education
## Interview Schedule

*Division of Labour*

1. Tell me about the roles you have had that relate to working with social work students.
    a. What is your current role in relation to teaching students?
    b. What is your current role in relation to the assessment of the student?
2. Who else do you closely relate to in your work with students, and what are their roles?
3. What is the difference between your role and that of the lecturers at the academic institution?

*Subject - Motivation and Professional Development*

4. What motivated you to become a FE?
    a. Does this still motivate you or has this changed?
5. Do you feel valued or rewarded for being a FE?
6. How prepared were you to be a FE before working with your first student?
7. What do you do to stay up to date with current practice in FE?
    a. What was the last thing you did to stay up to date about FE?

*Object and Tools*

8. What is the main objective of a practicum in your opinion?
9. What influences how you practice as a FE?
10. What tools help you in your work as a FE? (e.g. live observation, process recording, learning theory, management techniques, supervision models, learning agreement, debriefing)
11. What are the things you specifically do with students?
    a. What most helps students learn about social work practice?

*Rules and Community*

12. Tell me about any tensions between the policies of your agency and the academic institution in relation to FE.
13. What are the written and unwritten rules about FE in your agency?
14. Tell me about your interaction with other FE and the support you receive from them.
15. How do your social work colleagues, manager and employing agency view your work as a FE?

*History and Future*

16. What do you remember about the approach your FE used when you completed your social work education?
17. How is Field Education different to how it was done in the past in Christchurch?
    a. What would you like to see reintroduced in Field Education?
18. What are the major challenges facing Field Education in Christchurch at the moment?

FE: Refers to Field Educator, but the term that the participant uses to describe their role in Question 1 will be used during the interview.

# APPENDIX K - PHASE TWO PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Department of Human Services and Social Work
Telephone: +64 3664 2976
Email: dominic.chilvers@pg.cantebury.ac.nz

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha*
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

### Cultural-Historical Mediation in the Practice of Social Work Field Education

***What is the aim of this research?***

The aim of this research project is to contribute to the development of social work field education by examining the cultural-historical factors that impact on the practice of Field Educators. The project is in two phases and 20 individual interviews with Field Educators were undertaken in the first phase. A series of focus groups are now being conducted to discuss the findings from the interviews and to identify appropriate professional responses.

***Has the research received ethics approval?***

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and any complaints should be addressed to the Chair, Human Ethics Committee at human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz.

***Who can participate in a focus group?***

Any Social Worker who participated in an interview for Phase 1 or has provided field education since 2009 for social work students from the University of Canterbury or the Ara Institute of Canterbury may participate in a focus group for Phase 2 of the research.

***What is involved in participating in a focus group?***

In Phase 2, field educators will participate in a series of focus groups to review the findings from analysis of the individual interviews and identify appropriate professional responses. Focus groups will be held at the Ara Institute of Canterbury or the University of Canterbury and take no longer than 90 minutes. Participants are welcome to bring whānau support to the focus groups. The focus groups will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participants will have the opportunity to review the transcription for their group before any analysis is undertaken and this will involve a further time commitment of up to 60 minutes.

Unfortunately, it cannot be guaranteed that it will be possible to include you in a focus group even if you express an interest in the study. Participants will be selected to achieve representation from both large and small agencies and to ensure a range of gender, ethnicity and experience. If you are not selected then you will receive a letter explaining this decision.

***Are there any risks in participating?***

There should be no risks to you should you choose to participate. It is recognised that some participants may be concerned that the information they provide could be used to make decisions about their suitability for being a field educator in future. Although this study is being supported by academic institutions, they will not be provided with details of the individual data collected through the focus groups. Academic institutions will only have access to the final research report and this will be presented in a format that ensures individual participants cannot be identified. The researcher was the BSW Programme Leader at the Ara Institute of Canterbury and some participants may know him in a professional capacity. However, your participation in this research will have no bearing on any work you may do with the Ara Institute of Canterbury.

***How will my confidentiality be protected?***

To participate in Phase 2, practitioners will be required to provide their contact details in order to facilitate the focus group process. However, this information will not be made available to any third party, including other participants, without the express permission of the person involved. An assistant will participate in the focus groups to help with an audio recording of the session, which will later be transcribed verbatim. Both the assistant and transcriber will sign confidentiality agreements. Copies of the transcription will be made available for participants to check prior to the data being used in any analysis. All findings will be reported in such a manner that individual participants cannot be identified. All paper and electronic information will be secured in lockable or password protected storage facilities for 10 years at the University of Canterbury and then destroyed.

***Is participation voluntary and how do I withdraw from the research?***

Although this research is being supported by the academic institution that you provide field education for, participation is entirely voluntary and will have no bearing on your role as a field educator. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time prior to the actual focus group. Should you decide to withdraw from the study then you can do so by contacting the researcher or research supervisors (details below).

***How can I get a copy of the published results?***

At this stage specific plans for publication and dissemination of the results from this research have not been finalised. However, should you wish to receive a summary of the results then you should indicate this on your consent form. Copies of the full thesis will be available in the University of Canterbury library.

***Who can I contact if I have further questions about this research?***

The researcher for this study is Dominic Chilvers, a postgraduate student in the Department of Human Services and Social Work, University of Canterbury and he is undertaking this research as part of completing a Social Work PhD. Assoc. Professor Jane Maidment, University of Canterbury and Dr Andrew Frost, University of Queensland and are supervising the research project on behalf of the University of Canterbury and are available to answer any queries. Contact details are as follows:

**Dominic Chilvers**
University of Canterbury
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch 8140
022 024 4597
dominic.chilvers@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

**Assoc. Prof. Jane Maidment**
University of Canterbury
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch 8140
03 364 2987 ext. 7499
jane.maidment@canterbury.ac.nz

**Dr Andrew Frost**
Central Queensland
University
Bld C Sydney Street
Mackay QLD 7470 Australia
+617 4940 3320
a.r.frost@cqu.edu.au

***How to express an interest in participating?***

If you would like to participate in a focus group for this project then email Dominic Chilvers at dominic.chilvers@pg.canterbury.ac.nz and he will reply to make the necessary arrangements.

# APPENDIX L - FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

**Focus Group Questions**

1. Analysis of the individual interviews suggests that field educators have to manage the competing perspectives of students as additional staff or as protected learners. What are your thoughts about this tension and how might field educators support each other to more effectively manage this challenge?
2. Analysis of the individual interviews suggests that field educators experience variable levels of support from their colleagues and from the academic institutions and often experience isolation and a lack of guidance. What are your thoughts about this finding and how might field educators work collectively to manage this tension?
3. Analysis of the individual interviews suggests that field educators need to manage the competing expectations of the academic institution and practice context when deciding what students will do during a placement. What are your thoughts about this finding and how might field educators collectively respond to this challenge?
4. Analysis of the individual interviews suggests that Maori models of learning or practice have very little influence on field education practice. What are your thoughts about this finding and how might field educators collectively contribute to the development of bi-cultural approaches to field education?
5. Analysis of the individual interviews suggests that field educators are uncertain about the best methods and tools to use to support effective learning for students on placement and therefore rely on the assessment tool and their own personal creativity and trial and error to develop effective teaching methods. What are your thoughts about this finding and how might field educators learn and share effective methods of learning and teaching that are applicable to placements?
6. Analysis of the individual interviews suggests that there is a lack of connection between field educators, potentially limiting the opportunities for continuous improvement and mutual peer learning about the practice of field education. What are your thoughts about this finding and how could we create a stronger connection between practitioners to increase the sense of belonging to a team of field educators?

# APPENDIX M - FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

Department of Human Services and Social Work
Telephone: +64 3664 2976
Email: dominic.chilvers@pg.cantebury.ac.nz

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha*
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

## Cultural-Historical Mediation in the Practice of Social Work Field Education

## PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM AND CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT – PHASE 2

*To participate in Phase 2 of this research study you must confirm that you agree with the following statements. Please read the statements carefully and then complete the boxes overleaf to confirm your agreement.*

1. I have read and understood the information sheet provided describing the focus groups for Phase 2 of the research study titled "Cultural-Historical Mediation in the Practice of Social Work Field Education".
2. I agree to participate in Phase 2 of the study by participating in a focus group. I understand that the responses I provide will be treated as confidential and findings will be reported so that individual participants cannot be identified.
3. I understand that although participants in focus groups will know each other the information shared in the focus group is confidential and I undertake to ensure that no information is shared outside of the group that will identify any participants or the content of the discussion.
4. I understand that an assistant will participate in the focus group and that they have signed a confidentiality agreement.
5. I understand that the focus group will be audio recorded and transcribed by a transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement. I understand that I will have the opportunity to review the draft transcription prior to any analysis being undertaken.
6. I understand that all data from this research will be stored securely at the University of Canterbury for ten years following the study and then destroyed.
7. I consent to publication and dissemination of the results of the study using any format or method selected by the researcher on the understanding that my identity will not be revealed.
8. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time prior to the actual focus group, including withdrawing any information that I have provided to that date.

## PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM AND CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT – PHASE 2

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Participant's Name: | | |
| Organisation: | | |
| Job Title: | | |
| Address: | | |
| Telephone: | | |
| Email: | | |
| How long have you been qualified as a social worker? | Years | |
| How long have you been working as a field educator? | Years | |
| Are you a registered social worker? (Please circle) | YES | NO |
| Would you like to receive a summary of the research results? (Please circle) | YES | NO |
| Do you want to review the transcript of the focus group prior to any analysis being completed? (Please circle) | YES | NO |
| Signature: | | |
| Date: | | |

# APPENDIX N - CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Department of Human Services and Social Work
Telephone: +64 3664 2976
Email: dominic.chilvers@pg.cantebury.ac.nz

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha*
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

## CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Thank you for your participation in the research project titled "Cultural-historical mediation in the practice of social work field education". Protecting the confidentiality of the research participants is essential and you are therefore asked to sign the following confidentiality agreement.

I, _____, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all verbal information, audiotapes and documentations received from Dominic Chilvers related to his research on the study titled Cultural-historical mediation in the practice of social work field education. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual and the content of any discussion that may be revealed during my participation in a focus group or in audio recordings or in any associated documents.

2. To not make copies of any hand written notes, audio files or computerised files of the transcribed focus groups, unless specifically approved to do so by Dominic Chilvers.

3. To store all study-related audio files and materials in a password protected computer or safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.

4. To return all study-related materials to Dominic Chilvers in a complete and timely manner at the completion of my specific duties.

5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents or audio files from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices on completion of my specific duties.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Name (printed) _____

Signature _____

Date _____